THE

AGE OF REASON.

Price Half a Crown.

THE AGE OF REASON,

BEING

An INVESTIGATION of TRUE and FABULOUS THEOLOGY,

BY THOMAS PAINE.

SECRETARY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS TO CONGRESS IN THE AMERICAN WAR, AND AUTHOR OF THE WORKS ENTITLED COMMON SENSE AND RIGHTS OF MAN, &c.

PARIS:

Printed by BARROIS.

1794.

[*Second Year of the French Republic.*]

THE

AGE OF REASON:

BEING AN INVESTIGATION

OF TRUE AND OF FABULOUS

THEOLOGY.

IT has been my intention, for ſeveral years paſt, to publiſh my thoughts upon religion. I am well aware of the difficulties that attend the ſubject; and from that conſideration, had reſerved it to a more advanced period of life. I intended it to be the laſt offering I ſhould make to my fellow-citizens of all nations; and that at a time, when the purity of the motive that induced me to it, could not admit of a queſtion, even by thoſe who might diſapprove the work.

The circumſtance that has now taken place in France, of the total abolition of the whole

national order of prieſthood, and of every thing appertaining to compulſive ſyſtems of religion, and compulſive articles of faith, has not only precipitated my intention, but rendered a work of this kind exceedingly neceſſary; leſt, in the general wreck of ſuperſtition, of falſe ſyſtems of government, and falſe theology, we loſe ſight of morality, of humanity, and of the theology that is true.

As ſeveral of my colleagues, and others of my fellow-citizens of France, have given me the example of making their voluntary and individual profeſſion of faith, I alſo will make mine; and I do this with all that ſincerity and frankneſs with which the mind of man communicates with itſelf.

I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happineſs beyond this life.

I believe the equality of man, and I believe that religious duties conſiſt in doing juſtice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy.

But leſt it ſhould be ſuppoſed that I believe many other things in addition to theſe, I ſhall, in the progreſs of this work, declare the things I do

I do not believe, and my reaſons for not believing them.

I do not believe in the creed profeſſed by the Jewiſh church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkiſh church, by the Proteſtant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church.

All national inſtitutions of churches, whether Jewiſh, Chriſtian, or Turkiſh, appear to me no other than human inventions ſet up to terrify and enſlave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.

I do not mean by this declaration to condemn thoſe who believe otherwiſe. They have the ſame right to their belief as I have to mine. But it is neceſſary to the happineſs of man, that he be mentally faithful to himſelf. Infidelity does not conſiſt in believing, or in diſbelieving: it conſiſts in profeſſing to believe what he does not believe.

It is impoſſible to calculate the moral miſchief, if I may ſo expreſs it, that mental lying has produced in ſociety. When a man has ſo far corrupted and proſtituted the chaſtity of his mind, as to ſubſcribe his profeſſional belief to

things he does not believe, he has prepared himſelf for the commiſſion of every other crime. He takes up the trade of a prieſt for the ſake of gain, and in order to *qualify* himſelf for that trade, he begins with a perjury. Can we conceive any thing more deſtructive to morality than this?

Soon after I had publiſhed the pamphlet, COMMON-SENSE, in America, I ſaw the exceeding probability that a Revolution in the Syſtem of Government, would be followed by a revolution in the ſyſtem of religion. The adulterous connection of church and ſtate, wherever it had taken place, whether Jewiſh, Chriſtian, or Turkiſh, had ſo effectually prohibited, by pains and penalties, every diſcuſſion upon eſtabliſhed creeds, and upon firſt principles of religion, that until the ſyſtem of government ſhould be changed, thoſe ſubjects could not be brought fairly and openly before the world: but that whenever this ſhould be done, a revolution in the ſyſtem of religion would follow. Human inventions and prieſt-craft would be detected; and man would return to the pure, unmixed, and unadulterated belief of one God, and no more.

Every

Every national church or religion has eſtabliſhed itſelf by pretending ſome ſpecial miſſion from God communicated to certain individuals. The Jews have their Moſes; the Chriſtians their Jeſus Chriſt, their apoſtles and ſaints; and the Turks their Mahomet; as if the way to God was not open to every man alike.

Each of thoſe churches ſhow certain books which they call *revelation*, or the word of God. The Jews ſay that their word of God was given by God to Moſes face to face; the Chriſtians ſay, that their word of God came by divine inſpiration; and the Turks ſay, that their word of God (the Koran) was brought by an angel from heaven. Each of thoſe churches accuſes the other of unbelief; and, for my own part, I diſbelieve them all.

As it is neceſſary to affix right ideas to words, I will, before I proceed further into the ſubject, offer ſome obſervations on the word *revelation.* Revelation, when applied to religion, means ſomething communicated *immediately* from God to man.

No one will deny or diſpute the power of the Almighty to make ſuch a communication if he pleaſes. But admitting, for the ſake of

a caſe, that ſomething has been revealed to a certain perſon, and not revealed to any other perſon, it is revelation to that perſon only. When he tells it to a ſecond perſon, a ſecond to a third, a third to a fourth, and ſo on, it ceaſes to be a revelation to all thoſe perſons. It is revelation to the firſt perſon only, and *hearſay* to every other; and conſequently, they are not obliged to believe it.

It is a contradiction in terms and ideas to call any thing a revelation that comes to us at ſecond hand, either verbally or in writing. Revelation is neceſſarily limited to the firſt communication. After this, it is only an account of ſomething which that perſon ſays was a revelation made to him; and though he may find himſelf obliged to believe it, it cannot be incumbent on me to believe it in the ſame manner, for it was not a revelation made to *me*, and I have only his word for it that it was made to *him*.

When Moſes told the children of Iſrael that he received the two tables of the commandments from the hand of God, they were not obliged to believe him, becauſe they had no other authority for it than his telling them ſo; and I have no other authority

thority for it than ſome hiſtorian telling me ſo. The commandments carrying no internal evidence of divinity with them. They contain ſome good moral precepts, ſuch as any man qualified to be a law-giver or a legiſlator could produce himſelf, without having recourſe to ſupernatural intervention.*

When I am told that the Koran was written in heaven, and brought to Mahomet by an angel, the account comes to near the ſame kind of hearſay evidence, and ſecond hand authority, as the former. I did not ſee the angel myſelf, and therefore I have a right not to believe it.

When alſo I am told that a woman, called the Virgin Mary, ſaid, or gave out, that ſhe was with child without any cohabitation with a man, and that her betrothed huſband, Joſeph, ſaid, that an angel told him ſo, I have a right to believe them or not: ſuch a circumſtance required a much ſtronger

* This is, however, neceſſary to except the declaration, which ſays, that God *viſits the ſins of the fathers upon the children*. It is contrary to every principle of moral juſtice.

evidence than their bare word for it: but we have not even this; for neither Joſeph nor Mary wrote any ſuch matter themſelves. It is only reported by others that *they ſaid ſo*. It is hearſay upon hearſay, and I do not chuſe to reſt my belief upon ſuch evidence.

It is, however, not difficult to account for the credit that was given to the ſtory of Jeſus Chriſt being the Son of God. He was born when the heathen mythology had ſtill ſome faſhion and repute in the world, and that mythology had prepared the people for the belief of ſuch a ſtory. Almoſt all the extraordinary men that lived under the heathen mythology were reputed to be the ſons of ſome of their gods. It was not a new thing at that time to believe a man to have been celeſtially begotten: the intercourſe of gods with women was then a matter of familiar opinion. Their Jupiter, according to their accounts, had cohabited with hundreds: the ſtory, therefore, had nothing in it either new, wonderful, or obſcene: it was conformable to the opinions that then prevailed among the people called Gentiles, or mythologiſts, and it was thoſe people only that believed it. The Jews who had kept ſtrictly to the belief of one God, and no more, and who had always

rejected

rejected the heathen mythology, never credited the ſtory.

It is curious to obſerve how the theory of what is called the Chriſtian church, ſprung out of the tail of the heathen mythology. A direct incorporation took place in the firſt inſtance, by making the reputed founder to be celeſtially begotten. The trinity of gods that then followed was no other than a reduction of the former plurality, which was about twenty or thirty thouſand. The ſtatue of Mary ſucceeded the ſtatue of Diana of Epheſus. The deification of heroes, changed into the cannonization of ſaints. The mythologiſts had gods for every thing; the Chriſtian mythologiſts had ſaints for every thing. The church became as crouded with the one, as the pantheon had been with the other; and Rome was the place of both. The Chriſtian theory is little elſe than the idolatry of the ancient mythologiſts, accommodated to the purpoſes of power and revenue; and it yet remains to reaſon and philoſophy to aboliſh the amphibious fraud.

Nothing that is here ſaid can apply, even with the moſt diſtant diſreſpect, to the *real* character of Jeſus Chriſt. He was a virtuous and an amiable man. The morality that he preached

preached and practiſed was of the moſt benevolent kind; and though ſimilar ſyſtems of morality had been preached by Confucius, and by ſome of the Greek philoſophers, many years before; by the quakers ſince; and by many good men in all ages; it has not been exceeded by any.

Jeſus Chriſt wrote no account of himſelf, of his birth, parentage, or any thing elſe. Not a line of what is called the New Teſtament is of his writing. The hiſtory of him is altogether the work of other people; and as to the account given of his reſurrection and aſcenſion, it was the neceſſary counterpart to the ſtory of his birth. His hiſtorians, having brought him into the world in a ſupernatural manner, were obliged to take him out again in the ſame manner, or the firſt part of the ſtory muſt have fallen to the ground.

The wretched contrivance with which this latter part is told, exceeds every thing that went before it. The firſt part, that of the miraculous conception, was not a thing that admitted of publicity; and therefore the tellers of this part of the ſtory, had this advantage, that though they might not be credited, they could not be detected. They could not be expected

to

to prove it, becauſe it was not one of thoſe things that admitted of proof, and it was impoſſible that the perſon of whom it was told could prove it himſelf.

But the reſurrection of a dead perſon from the grave, and his aſcenſion through the air, is a thing very different as to the evidence it admits of, to the inviſible conception of a child in the womb. The reſurrection and aſcenſion, ſuppoſing them to have taken place, admitted of public and occular demonſtration, like that of the aſcenſion of a balloon, or the ſun at noon day, to all Jeruſalem at leaſt. A thing which every body is required to believe, requires that the proof and evidence of it ſhould be equal to all, and univerſal; and as the public viſibility of this laſt related act was the only evidence that could give ſanction to the former part, the whole of it falls to the ground, becauſe that evidence never was given. Inſtead of this, a ſmall number of perſons, not more than eight or nine, are introduced as proxies for the whole world, to ſay, they *ſaw it*, and all the reſt of the world are called upon to believe it. But it appears that Thomas did not believe the reſurrection; and, as they ſay, would not believe, without having occular and manual demonſtration himſelf. *So neither will I*; and the

the reaſon is equally as good for me and for every other perſon, as for Thomas.

It is in vain to attempt to palliate or diſguiſe this matter. The ſtory, ſo far as relates to the ſupernatural part, has every mark of fraud and impoſition ſtamped upon the face of it. Who were the authors of it is as impoſſible for us now to know, as it is for us to be aſſured, that the books in which the account is related, were written by the perſons whoſe names they bear. The beſt ſurviving evidence we now have reſpecting this affair is the Jews. They are regularly deſcended from the people who lived in the times this reſurrection and aſcenſion is ſaid to have happened, and they ſay, *it is not true.* It has long appeared to me a ſtrange inconſiſtency to cite the Jews as a proof of the truth of the ſtory. It is juſt the ſame as if a man were to ſay, I will prove the truth of what I have told you, by producing the people who ſay it is falſe.

That ſuch a perſon as Jeſus Chriſt exiſted, and that he was crucified, which was the mode of execution at that day, are hiſtorical relations ſtrictly within the limits of probability. He preached moſt excellent morality, and the equality of man; but he preached alſo againſt the corruptions

corruptions and avarice of the Jewiſh prieſts; and this brought upon him the hatred and vengeance of the whole order of prieſt-hood. The accuſation which thoſe prieſts brought againſt him, was that of ſedition and conſpiracy againſt the Roman government, to which the Jews were then ſubject and tributary; and it is not improbable that the Roman government might have ſome ſecret apprehenſion of the effects of his doctrine as well as the Jewiſh prieſts; neither is it improbable that Jeſus Chriſt had in contemplation the delivery of the Jewiſh nation from the bondage of the Romans. Between the two, however, this virtuous reformer and revolutioniſt loſt his life.

It is upon this plain narrative of facts, together with another caſe I am going to mention, that the Chriſtian mythologiſts, calling themſelves the Chriſtian church, have erected their fable, which for abſurdity and extravagance is not exceeded by any thing that is to be found in the mythology of the ancients.

The ancient mythologiſts tell that the race of Giants made war againſt Jupiter, and that one of them threw an hundred rocks againſt him at one throw; that Jupiter defeated him with thunder, and confined him afterwards under

der Mount Etna; and that every time the Giant turns himſelf, Mount Etna belches fire. It is here eaſy to ſee that the circumſtance of the mountain, that of its being a volcano, ſuggeſted the idea of the fable; and that the fable is made to ſit and wind itſelf up with that circumſtance.

The Chriſtian mythologiſts tell that their Satan made war againſt the Almighty, who defeated him, and confined him afterwards, not under a mountain, but in a pit. It is here eaſy to ſee that the firſt fable ſuggeſted the idea of the ſecond; for the fable of Jupiter and the Giants was told many hundred years before that of Satan.

Thus far the ancient and the Chriſtian mythologiſts differ very little from each other. But the latter have contrived to carry the matter much farther. They have contrived to connect the fabulous part of the ſtory of Jeſus Chriſt, with the fable originating from Mount Etna: and in order to make all the parts of the ſtory tye together, they have taken to their aid the traditions of the Jews; for the Chriſtian mythology is made up partly from the ancient mythology, and partly from the Jewiſh traditions.

The

The Chriſtian mythologiſts, after having confined Satan in a pit, were obliged to let him out again, to bring on the ſequel of the fable. He is then introduced into the garden of Eden in the ſhape of a ſnake, or a ſerpent, and in that ſhape he enters into familiar converſation with Eve, who is no ways ſurpriſed to hear a ſnake talk; and the iſſue of this tête-à-tête is, that he perſuades her to eat an apple, and the eating of that apple, damns all mankind.

After giving Satan this triumph over the whole creation, one would have ſuppoſed that the church mythologiſts would have been kind enough to ſend him back again to the pit; or, if they had not done this, that they would have put a mountain upon him, (for they ſay that their faith can remove a mountain) or have put him *under* a mountain, as the former mythologiſts had done, to prevent his getting again among the women, and doing more miſchief. But inſtead of this, they leave him at large without even obliging him to give his parole. The ſecret of which is, that they could not do without him; and after being at the trouble of making him, they bribed him to ſtay. They promiſed him ALL the Jews, ALL the Turks by anticipation, nine-

tenths

tenths of the world beſide, and Mahomet into the bargain. After this, who can doubt the bountifulneſs of the Chriſtian mythology?

Having thus made an inſurrection and a battle in heaven, in which none of the combatants cõuld be either killed or wounded—put Satan into the pit—let him out again—given him a triumph over the whole creation—damned all mankind by the eating of an apple, theſe Chriſtian mythologiſts bring the two ends of their fable together. They repreſent this virtuous and amiable man, Jeſus Chriſt, to be at once both God and man, and alſo the Son of God, celeſtially begotten on purpoſe to be ſacrificed, becauſe, they ſay, that Eve in her longing had eaten an apple.

Putting aſide every thing that might excite laughter by its abſurdity, or deteſtation by its prophaneneſs, and confining ourſelves merely to an examination of the parts, it is impoſſible to conceive a ſtory more derogatory to the Almighty, more inconſiſtent with his wiſdom, more contradictory to his power, than this ſtory is.

In order to make for it a foundation to riſe upon, the inventors were under the neceſſity of

of giving to the being, whom they call Satan, a power equally as great, if not greater, than they attribute to the Almighty. They have not only given him the power of liberating himſelf from the pit, after what they call his fall, but they have made that power increaſe afterwards to infinity. Before this fall, they repreſent him only as an angel of limited exiſtence, as they repreſent the reſt. After his fall, he becomes, by their account, omnipreſent. He exiſts every where, and at the ſame time. He occupies the whole immenſity of ſpace.

Not content with this deification of Satan, they repreſent him as defeating by ſtratagem, in the ſhape of an animal of the creation, all the power and wiſdom of the Almighty. They repreſent him as having compelled the Almighty to the *direct neceſſity* either of ſurrendering the whole of the creation to the government and ſovereignty of this Satan, or of capitulating for its redemption by coming down upon earth, and exhibiting himſelf upon a croſs in the ſhape of a man.

Had the inventors of this ſtory told it the contrary way, that is, had they repreſented the Almighty as compelling Satan to exhibit *himſelf* on a croſs in the ſhape of a ſnake, as a puniſhment for his new tranſgreſſion, the ſtory would have been leſs abſurd, leſs contradictory. But inſtead of this, they make the tranſgreſſor triumph, and the Almighty fall.

That many good men have believed this ſtrange fable and lived very good lives under that belief (for credulity is not a crime) is what I have no doubt of. In the firſt place, they were educated to believe it, and they would have believed any thing elſe in the ſame manner. There are alſo many who have been ſo enthuſiaſtically enraptured by what they conceived to be the infinite love of God to man, in making a ſacrifice of himſelf, that the vehemence of the idea has forbidden and deterred them from examining into the abſurdity and profaneneſs of the ſtory. The more unnatural any thing is, the more is it capable of becoming the object of diſmal admiration.

But

But if objects for gratitude and admiration are our desire, do they not present themselves every hour to our eyes? Do we not see a fair creation prepared to receive us the instant we were born—a world furnished to our hands that cost us nothing? Is it we that light up the sun; that pour down the rain; and fill the earth with abundance? Whether we sleep or wake, the vast machinery of the universe still goes on. Are these things, and the blessings they indicate in future, nothing to us? Can our gross feelings be excited by no other subjects than tragedy and suicide? Or is the gloomy pride of man become so intolerable, that nothing can flatter it but a sacrifice of the Creator?

I know that this bold investigation will alarm many, but it would be paying too great a compliment to their credulity to forbear it upon that account. The times and the subject demand it to be done. The suspicion that the theory of what is called the Christian church is fabulous, is becoming very extensive in all countries; and it will be a consolation to men staggering under

that ſuſpicion, and doubting what to believe and what to diſbelieve, to ſee the ſubject freely inveſtigated. I therefore paſs on to an examination of the books called the Old and the New Teſtament.

Theſe books, beginning with Geneſis and ending with Revelations (which by the bye is a book of riddles that requires a Revelation to explain it) are, we are told, the word of God. It is therefore proper for us to know who told us ſo, that we may know what credit to give to the report. The anſwer to this queſtion is, that nobody can tell, except that we tell one another ſo. The caſe, however, hiſtorically appears to be as follows:

When the church mythologiſts eſtabliſhed their ſyſtem, they collected all the writings they could find, and managed them as they pleaſed. It is a matter altogether of uncertainty to us whether ſuch of the writings as now appear, under the name of the Old and the New Teſtament, are in the ſame ſtate in which thoſe collectors ſay they found them; or whether they added, altered, abridged, or dreſſed them up.

Be

Be this as it may, they decided by *vote* which of the books out of the collection they had made, ſhould be the WORD OF GOD, and which ſhould not. They rejected ſeveral; they voted others to be doubtful, ſuch as the books called the Apocraphy; and thoſe books which had a majority of votes, were voted to be the word of God. Had they voted otherwiſe, all the people, ſince calling themſelves chriſtians, had believed otherwiſe; for the belief of the one comes from the vote of the other. Who the people were that did all this, we know nothing of; they called themſelves by the general name of the church; and this is all we know of the matter.

As we have no other external evidence or authority for believing thoſe books to be the word of God, than what I have mentioned, which is no evidence or authority at all, I come, in the next place, to examine the internal evidence contained in the books themſelves.

In the former part of this eſſay, I have ſpoken of revelation. I now proceed further

with that ſubject, for the purpoſe of applying it to the books in queſtion.

Revelation is a communication of ſomething, which the perſon, to whom that thing is revealed, did not know before. For if I have done a thing, or ſeen it done, it needs no revelation to tell me I have done it, or ſeen it, nor to enable me to tell it, or to write it.

Revelation, therefore, cannot be applied to any thing done upon earth of which man is himſelf the actor or the witneſs; and conſequently all the hiſtorical and anecdotal part of the Bible, which is almoſt the whole of it, is not within the meaning and compaſs of the word revelation, and therefore is not the word of God.

When Samſon ran off with the gate-poſts of Gaza, if he ever did ſo (and whether he did or not is nothing to us) or when he viſited his Delilah, or caught his foxes, or did any thing elſe, what has revelation to do with theſe things? If they were facts, he could tell them himſelf; or his ſecretary,

tary, if he kept one, could write them, if they were worth either telling or writing; and if they were fictions, revelation could not make them true; and whether true or not, we are neither the better nor the wiſer for knowing them.—When we contemplate the immenſity of that Being, who directs and governs the incomprehenſible WHOLE, of which the utmoſt ken of human ſight can diſcover but a part, we ought to feel ſhame at calling ſuch paltry ſtories the word of God.

As to the account of the creation, with which the book of Geneſis opens, it has all the appearance of being a tradition which the Iſraelites had among them before they came into Egypt; and after their departure from that country, they put it at the head of their hiſtory, without telling, as it is moſt probable that they did not know, how they came by it. The manner in which the account opens, ſhews it to be traditionary. It begins abruptly. It is nobody that ſpeaks. It is nobody that hears. It is addreſſed to nobody. It has neither firſt, ſecond, nor third perſon. It has

every criterion of being a tradition. It has no voucher. Moſes does not take it upon himſelf by introducing it with the formality that he uſes on other occaſions, ſuch as that of ſaying, "*The Lord ſpake unto Moſes, ſaying.*"

Why it has been called the Moſaic account of the creation, I am at a loſs to conceive. Moſes, I believe, was too good a judge of ſuch ſubjects to put his name to that account. He had been educated among the Egyptians, who were a people as well ſkilled in ſcience, and particularly in aſtronomy, as any people of their day; and the ſilence and caution that Moſes obſerves, in not authenticating the account, is a good negative evidence that he neither told it, nor believed it.—The caſe is, that every nation of people has been world-makers, and the Iſraelites had as much right to ſet up the trade of world-making as any of the reſt; and as Moſes was not an Iſraelite, he might not chuſe to contradict the tradition. The account, however, is harmleſs; and this is more than can be ſaid for many other parts of the Bible.

Whenever

Whenever we read the obſcene ſtories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveneſs, with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more conſiſtent that we called it the word of a demon, than the word of God. It is a hiſtory of wickedneſs, that has ſerved to corrupt and brutalize mankind; and, for my own part, I ſincerely deteſt it, as I deteſt every thing that is cruel.

We ſcarcely meet with any thing, a few phraſes excepted, but what deſerves either our abhorrence, or our contempt, till we come to the miſcellaneous parts of the Bible. In the anonymous publications, the Pſalms and the book of Job, more particularly in the latter, we find a great deal of elevated ſentiment reverentially expreſſed of the power and benignity of the Almighty; but they ſtand on no higher rank than many other compoſitions on ſimilar ſubjects, as well before that time as ſince.

The proverbs, which are ſaid to be Solomon's, though moſt probably a collection (becauſe

(beeauſe they diſcover a knowledge of life, which his ſituation excluded him from knowing) are an inſtructive table of ethics. They are inferior in keenneſs to the proverbs of the Spaniards, and not more wiſe and œconomical than thoſe of the American Franklin.

All the remaining parts of the Bible, generally known by the name of the prophets, are the works of the Jewiſh poets and itinerant preachers, who mixed poetry, anecdote, and devotion together; and thoſe works ſtill retain the air and ſtile of poetry, though in tranſlation.*

There

* As there are many readers who do not ſee that a compoſition is poetry unleſs it be in rhyme, it is for their information that I add this note.

Poetry conſiſts principally in two things: Imagery and compoſition. The compoſition of poetry differs from that of proſe in the manner of mixing long and ſhort ſyllables together. Take a long ſyllable out of a line of poetry, and put a ſhort one in the room of it, or put a long ſyllable where a ſhort one ſhould be, and that line will loſe its poetical harmony. It will have an effect upon the line like that of miſplacing a note in a ſong.

The

There is not, throughout the whole book, called the Bible, any word that deſcribes to us what we call a poet, nor any word that deſcribes what we call poetry. The caſe is, that the word *prophet*, to which later times have affixed a new idea, was the Bible word

The imagery in thoſe books, called the prophets, appertains altogether to poetry. It is fictitious and often extravagant, and not admiſſible in any other kind of writing than poetry.

To ſhew that theſe writings are compoſed in poetical numbers, I will take ten ſyllables as they ſtand in the book, and make a line of the ſame number of ſyllables (heroic meaſure) that ſhall rhyme with the laſt word. It will then be ſeen, that the compoſition of thoſe books is poetical meaſure. The inſtance I ſhall firſt produce is from Iſaiah.

" *Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth.*"
'Tis God himſelf that calls attention forth.

Another inſtance I ſhall quote is from the mournful Jeremiah, to which I ſhall add two other lines, for the purpoſe of carrying out the figure, and ſhewing the intention of the poet.

" *O! that mine head were waters, and mine eyes*"
Were fountains, flowing like the liquid ſkies;
Then would I give the mighty flood releaſe,
And weep a deluge for the human race.

for

for poet, and the word *propheſying* meant the art of making poetry. It alſo meant the art of playing poetry to a tune upon any inſtrument of muſic.

We read of propheſying with pipes, tabrets, and horns. Of propheſying with harps, with pſalteries, with cymbals, and with every other inſtrument of muſic then in faſhion. Were we now to ſpeak of propheſying with a fiddle, or with a pipe and tabor, the expreſſion would have no meaning, or would appear ridiculous, and to ſome people contemptuous, becauſe we have changed the meaning of the word.

We are told of Saul being among the *prophets*, and alſo that he propheſied; but we are not told what *they propheſied*, nor what *he propheſied*. The caſe is, there was nothing to tell; for theſe prophets were a company of muſicians and poets; and Saul joined in the concert; and this was called *propheſying*.

The account given of this affair in the book called Samuel, is, that Saul met a

company

company of prophets; a whole company of them! coming down with a pſaltery, a tabret, a pipe, and a harp, and that they propheſied, and that he propheſied with them. But it appears afterwards, that Saul propheſied badly, that is, he performed his part badly; for it is ſaid, that "an *evil ſpirit from God** came upon Saul, and he propheſied."

Now were there no other paſſage in the book, called the Bible, than this, to demonſtrate to us that we have loſt the original meaning of the word *propheſy*, and ſubſtituted another meaning in its place, this alone would be ſufficient; for it is impoſſible to uſe and apply the word *propheſy* in the place it is here uſed and applied, if we give to it the ſenſe which later times have affixed to it. The manner in which it is here uſed ſtrips it of all religious meaning, and ſhews that a man might then be a *prophet*, or might *propheſy*,

* As thoſe men, who call themſelves divines and commentators, are very fond of puzzling one another, I leave them to conteſt the meaning of the firſt part of the phraſe, that of, *an evil ſpirit of God*. I keep to my text. I keep to the meaning of the word propheſy.

as

as he may now be a poet, or a muſician, without any regard to the morality or the immorality of his character. The word was originally a term of ſcience, promiſcuouſly applied to poetry and to muſic, and not reſtricted to any ſubject upon which poetry and muſic might be exerciſed.

Deborah and Barak are called prophets, not becauſe they predicted any thing, but becauſe they compoſed the poem or ſong that bears their name in celebration of an act already done: David is ranked among the prophets, for he was a muſician; and was alſo reputed to be (though perhaps very erroneouſly) the author of the pſalms. But Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, are not called prophets. It does not appear from any accounts we have that they could either ſing, play muſic, or make poetry.

We are told of the greater and the leſſer prophets. They might as well tell us of the greater and the leſſer God; for there cannot be degrees in propheſying conſiſtently with its modern ſenſe. But there are degrees in poetry, and therefore the phraſe is reconcilable

cilable to the caſe, when we underſtand by it the greater and the leſſer poets.

It is altogether unneceſſary, after this, to offer any obſervations upon what thoſe men, ſtiled prophets, have written. The axe goes at once to the root, by ſhewing that the original meaning of the word has been miſtaken, and conſequently all the inferences that have been drawn from thoſe books, the devotional reſpect that has been paid to them, and the laboured commentaries that have been written upon them, under that miſtaken meaning, are not worth diſputing about.—In many things, however, the writings of the Jewiſh poets, deſerve a better fate than that of being bound up, as they now are, with the traſh that accompanies them, under the abuſed name of the word of God.

If we permit ourſelves to conceive right ideas of things, we muſt neceſſarily affix the idea, not only of unchangeableneſs, but of the utter impoſſibility of any change taking place, by any means or accident whatever, in that which we would honour with the name

name of the word of God; and therefore the word of God cannot exiſt in any written or human language.

The continually progreſſive change to which the meaning of words is ſubject, the want of an univerſal language which renders tranſlations neceſſary, the errors to which tranſlations are again ſubject, the miſtakes of copyiſts and printers, together with the poſſibility of wilful alteration, are of themſelves evidences, that human language, whether in ſpeech or in print, cannot be the vehicle of the word of God.—The word of God exiſts in ſomething elſe.

Did the book, called the Bible, excel in purity of ideas and expreſſion, all the books that are now extant in the world, I would not take it for my rule of faith, as being the word of God; becauſe the poſſibility would nevertheleſs exiſt of my being impoſed upon. But when I ſee throughout the greateſt part of this book, ſcarcely any thing but a hiſtory of the groſſeſt vices, and a collection of the moſt paltry and contemptible

temptible tales, I cannot diſhonour my Creator by calling it by his name.

Thus much for the Bible. I now go on to the book called the New Teſtament. The *new* Teſtament! that is, the *new* Will, as if there could be two wills of the Creator.

Had it been the object or the intention of Jeſus Chriſt to eſtabliſh a new religion, he would undoubtedly have written the ſyſtem himſelf, or *procured it to be written* in his life time. But there is no publication extant authenticated with his name. All the books called the New Teſtament were written after his death. He was a Jew by birth and by profeſſion; and he was the ſon of God in like manner that every other perſon is; for the Creator is the Father of All.

The firſt four books, called Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, do not give a hiſtory of the life of Jeſus Chriſt, but only detached anecdotes of him. It appears from theſe books, that the whole time of his being a preacher was not more than eighteen

months; and it was only during this ſhort time, that thoſe men became acquainted with him. They make mention of him, at the age of twelve years, ſitting, they ſay, among the Jewiſh doctors, aſking and anſwering them queſtions. As this was ſeveral years before their acquaintance with him began, it is moſt probable they had this anecdote from his parents. From this time there is no account of him for about ſixteen years. Where he lived, or how he employed himſelf during this interval, is not known. Moſt probably he was working at his father's trade, which was that of a carpenter. It does not appear that he had any ſchool education, and the probability is that he could not write, for his parents were extremely poor, as appears from their not being able to pay for a bed when he was born.

It is ſomewhat curious that the three perſons, whoſe names are the moſt univerſally recorded, were of very obſcure parentage. Moſes was a foundling, Jeſus Chriſt was born in a ſtable, and Mahomet was a mule-driver. The firſt and the laſt of theſe men, were

were founders of different ſyſtems of religion; but Jeſus Chriſt founded no new ſyſtem. He called men to the practice of moral virtues, and the belief of one God. The great trait in his character is philanthropy.

The manner in which he was apprehended, ſhews that he was not much known at that time; and it ſhews alſo that the meetings he then held with his followers were in ſecret; and that he had given over, or ſuſpended, preaching publicly. Judas could no otherways betray him than by giving information where he was, and pointing him out to the officers that went to arreſt him; and the reaſon for employing and paying Judas to do this, could ariſe only from the cauſes already mentioned, that of his not being much known, and living concealed.

The idea of his concealment not only agrees very ill with his reputed divinity, but aſſociates with it ſomething of puſillanimity; and his being betrayed, or in other words, his being apprehended, on the information

of one of his followers, ſhews that he did not intend to be apprehended, and conſequently that he did not intend to be crucified.

The Chriſtian mythologiſts tell us, that Chriſt died for the ſins of the world, and that he came on *purpoſe to die*. Would it not then have been the ſame if he had died of a fever, or of the ſmall pox, of old age, or of any thing elſe?

The declaratory ſentence which, they ſay, was paſſed upon Adam in caſe he ate of the apple, was not, that *thou ſhalt ſurely be crucified, but thou ſhalt ſurely die*. The ſentence was death, and not the *manner of dying*. Crucifixion, therefore, or any other particular manner of dying, made no part of the ſentence that Adam was to ſuffer, and conſequently, even upon their own tactic, it could make no part of the ſentence that Chriſt was to ſuffer in the room of Adam. A fever would have done as well as a croſs, if there was any occaſion for either.

This

This ſentence of death which, they tell us, was thus paſſed upon Adam, muſt either have meant dying naturally, that is, ceaſing to live, or, have meant what theſe mythologiſts call damnation: and conſequently, the act of dying on the part of Jeſus Chriſt, muſt, according to their ſyſtem, apply as a prevention to one or other of theſe two *things* happening to Adam and to us.

That it does not prevent our dying is evident, becauſe we all die; and if their accounts of longevity be true, men die faſter ſince the crucifixion than before: and with reſpect to the ſecond explanation, (including with it the *natural death* of Jeſus Chriſt as a ſubſtitute for the *eternal death or damnation* of all mankind) it is impertinently repreſenting the Creator as coming off, or revoking the ſentence, by a pun or a quibble upon the word *death*. That manufacturer of quibbles, St. Paul, if he wrote the books that bear his name, has helped this quibble on, by making another quibble upon the word *Adam*. He makes there to be two Adams; the one who ſins

in fact, and ſuffers by proxy; the other who ſins by proxy and ſuffers in fact. A religion thus interlarded with quibble, ſubterfuge and pun, has a tendency to inſtruct its profeſſors in the practice of theſe arts. They acquire the habit without being aware of the cauſe.

If Jeſus Chriſt was the Being which thoſe mythologiſts tell us he was, and that he came into this world to *ſuffer*, which is a word they ſometimes uſe inſtead of *to die*, the only real ſuffering he could have endured would have been *to live*. His exiſtence here was a ſtate of exilement or tranſportation from heaven, and the way back to his original country was to die.—In fine, every thing in this ſtrange ſyſtem is the reverſe of what it pretends to be. It is the reverſe of truth, and I become ſo tired with examining into its inconſiſtencies and abſurdities, that I haſten to the concluſion of it, in order to proceed to ſomething better.

How much, or what parts of the books called the New Teſtament, were written by the perſons whoſe names they bear, is what we

we can know nothing of, neither are we certain in what language they were originally written. The matters they now contain may be claſſed under two heads: anecdote, and epiſtolary correſpondence.

The four books already mentioned, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are altogether anecdotal. They relate events after they had taken place. They tell what Jeſus Chriſt did and ſaid, and what others did and ſaid to him; and in ſeveral inſtances they relate the ſame event differently. Revelation is neceſſarily out of the queſtion with reſpect to thoſe books; not only becauſe of the diſagreement of the writers, but becauſe revelation cannot be applied to the relating of facts by the perſons who ſaw them done, nor to the relating or recording of any diſcourſe or converſation by thoſe who heard it. The book, called the Acts of the Apoſtles, an anonymous work, belongs alſo to the anecdotal part.

All the other parts of the New Teſtament, except the book of enigmas, called the Revelations, are a collection of letters under

the name of Epiſtles; and the forgery of letters has been ſuch a common practice in the world, that the probability is, at leaſt, equal, whether they are genuine or forged. One thing, however, is much leſs equivocal, which is, that out of the matters contained in thoſe books, together with the aſſiſtance of ſome old ſtories, the church has ſet up a ſyſtem of religion very contradictory to the character of the perſon whoſe name it bears. It has ſet up a religion of pomp and of revenue in pretended imitation of a perſon whoſe life was humility and poverty.

The invention of a purgatory, and of the releaſing of ſouls therefrom, by prayers, bought of the church with money; the ſelling of pardons, diſpenſations, and indulgences, are revenue laws, without bearing that name or carrying that appearance. But the caſe nevertheleſs is, that thoſe things derive their origin from the proxyſm of the crucifixion, and the theory deduced therefrom, which was, that one perſon could ſtand in the place of another, and could perform meritorious ſervices for him. The probability therefore is, that the whole theory

theory or doctrine of what is called the redemption (which is ſaid to have been accompliſhed by the act of one perſon in the room of another) was originally fabricated on purpoſe to bring forward and build all thoſe ſecondary and pecuniary redemptions upon; and that the paſſages in the books upon which the idea or theory of redemption is built, have been manufactured and fabricated for that purpoſe. Why are we to give this church credit, when ſhe tells us that thoſe books are genuine in every part, any more than we give her credit for every thing elſe ſhe has told us; or for the miracles ſhe ſays ſhe has performed. That ſhe *could* fabricate writings is certain, becauſe ſhe could write; and the compoſition of the writings in queſtion, is of that kind that any body might do it; and that ſhe *did* fabricate them is not more inconſiſtent with probability, than that ſhe ſhould tell us, as ſhe has done, that ſhe could and did work miracles.

Since then no external evidence can, at this long diſtance of time, be produced to prove whether the church fabricated the doctrine called redemption or not (for ſuch evidence,

evidence, whether for or againſt, would be ſubject to the ſame ſuſpicion of being fabricated) the caſe can only be referred to the internal evidence which the thing carries of itſelf; and this affords a very ſtrong preſumption of its being a fabrication. For the internal evidence is, that the theory or doctrine of redemption has for its baſis, an idea of pecuniary juſtice, and not that of moral juſtice.

If I owe a perſon money and cannot pay him, and he threatens to put me in priſon, another perſon can take the debt upon himſelf, and pay it for me. But if I have committed a crime, every circumſtance of the caſe is changed. Moral juſtice cannot take the innocent for the guilty, even if the innocent would offer itſelf. To ſuppoſe juſtice to do this, is to deſtroy the principle of its exiſtence, which is the thing itſelf. It is then no longer juſtice. It is indiſcriminate revenge.

This ſingle reflection will ſhew that the doctrine of redemption is founded on a mere pecuniary idea correſponding to that of a debt

debt which another perſon might pay; and as this pecuniary idea correſponds again with the ſyſtem of ſecond redemptions obtained through the means of money given to the church, for pardons, the probability is, that the ſame perſons fabricated both the one and the other of thoſe theories; and that, in truth, there is no ſuch thing as redemption; that it is fabulous; and that man ſtands in the ſame relative condition with his Maker he ever did ſtand ſince man exiſted; and that it is his greateſt conſolation to think ſo.

Let him believe this, and he will live more conſiſtently and morally than by any other ſyſtem. It is by his being taught to contemplate himſelf as an out-law, as an outcaſt, as a beggar, as a mumper, as one thrown, as it were, on a dunghill, at an immenſe diſtance from his Creator, and who muſt make his approaches by creeping and cringing to intermediate beings, that he conceives either a contemptuous diſregard for every thing under the name of religion, or becomes indifferent, or turns, what he calls, devout. In the latter caſe, he conſumes his life

life in grief, or the affectation of it. His prayers are reproaches. His humility is ingratitude. He calls himſelf a worm, and the fertile earth a dunghill; and all the bleſſings of life by the thankleſs name of vanities. He deſpiſes the choiceſt gift of God to man, the GIFT OF REASON; and having endeavoured to force upon himſelf the belief of a ſyſtem againſt which reaſon revolts, he ungratefully calls it *human reaſon*, as if man could give reaſon to himſelf.

Yet with all this ſtrange appearance of humility, and this contempt for human reaſon, he ventures into the boldeſt preſumptions. He finds fault with every thing. His ſelfiſhneſs is never ſatisfied; his ingratitude is never at an end. He takes on himſelf to direct the Almighty what to do, even in the government of the univerſe. He prays dictatorially. When it is ſun-ſhine, he prays for rain, and when it is rain, he prays for ſun-ſhine. He follows the ſame idea in every thing that he prays for; for what is the amount of all his prayers, but an attempt to make the Almighty change his mind, and act

act otherwiſe than he does. It is as if he were to ſay—thou knoweſt not ſo well as I.

But ſome perhaps will ſay, Are we to have no word of God—No revelation? I anſwer yes. There is a word of God; there is a revelation.

THE WORD OF GOD IS THE CREATION WE BEHOLD: And it is in *this word*, which no human invention can counterfeit or alter, that God ſpeaketh univerſally to man.

Human language is local and changeable, and is therefore incapable of being uſed as the means of unchangeable and univerſal information. The idea that God ſent Jeſus Chriſt to publiſh, as they ſay, the glad tidings to all nations, from one end of the earth unto the other, is conſiſtent only with the ignorance of thoſe who know nothing of the extent of the world, and who believed, as thoſe world-ſaviours believed, and continued to believe, for ſeveral centuries (and that in contradiction to the diſcoveries of philoſophers, and the experience of navigators) that

that the earth was flat like a trencher; and that a man might walk to the end of it.

But how was Jeſus Chriſt to make any thing known to all nations? He could ſpeak but one language, which was Hebrew; and there are in the world ſeveral hundred languages. Scarcely any two nations ſpeak the ſame language, or underſtand each other; and as to tranſlations, every man who knows any thing of languages, knows that it is impoſſible to tranſlate from one language into another not only without loſing a great part of the original, but frequently of miſtaking the ſenſe: and beſides all this, the art of printing was wholly unknown at the time Chriſt lived.

It is always neceſſary that the means that are to accompliſh any end, be equal to the accompliſhment of that end, or the end cannot be accompliſhed. It is in this, that the difference between finite and infinite power and wiſdom diſcovers itſelf. Man frequently fails in accompliſhing his end, from a natural inability of the power to the purpoſe; and frequently from the want of wiſdom to

apply

apply power properly. But it is impoſſible for infinite power and wiſdom to fail as man faileth. The means it uſeth are always equal to the end: but human language, more eſpecially as there is not an univerſal language, is incapable of being uſed as an univerſal means of unchangeable and uniform information; and therefore it is not the means that God uſeth in manifeſting himſelf univerſally to man.

It is only in the CREATION that all our ideas and conceptions of a *word of God* can unite. The creation ſpeaketh an univerſal language, independently of human ſpeech or human language, multiplied and various as they be. It is an ever exiſting original, which every man can read. It cannot be forged; it cannot be counterfeited; it cannot be loſt; it cannot be altered; it cannot be ſuppreſſed. It does not depend upon the will of man whether it ſhall be publiſhed or not; it publiſhes itſelf from one end of the earth to the other. It preaches to all nations and to all worlds; and this *word of God* reveals to man all that is neceſſary for man to know of God.

Do we want to contemplate his power? We ſee it in the immenſity of the creation. Do we want to contemplate his wiſdom? We ſee it in the unchangeable order by which the incomprehenſible Whole is governed. Do we want to contemplate his munificence? We ſee it in the abundance with which he fills the earth. Do we want to contemplate his mercy? We ſee it in his not withholding that abundance even from the unthankful. In fine, do we want to know what God is? Search not the book called the ſcripture, which any human hand might make, but the ſcripture called the Creation.

The only idea man can affix to the name of God, is, that of a *firſt cauſe*, the cauſe of all things. And incomprehenſibly difficult as it is for man to conceive what a firſt cauſe is, he arrives at the belief of it, from the ten-fold greater difficulty of diſbelieving it. It is difficult beyond deſcription to conceive that ſpace can have no end; but it is more difficult to conceive an end. It is difficult beyond the power of man to conceive an eternal duration of what we call time; but it is more impoſſible to conceive a time when

when there ſhall be no time. In like manner of reaſoning, every thing we behold carries in itſelf the internal evidence that it did not make itſelf. Every man is an evidence to himſelf, that he did not make himſelf; neither could his father make himſelf, nor his grandfather, nor any of his race; neither could any tree, plant, or animal, make itſelf: and it is the conviction ariſing from this evidence, that carries us on, as it were, by neceſſity, to the belief of a firſt cauſe eternally exiſting, of a nature totally different to any material exiſtence we know of, and by the power of which all things exiſt, and this firſt cauſe man calls God.

It is only by the exerciſe of reaſon, that man can diſcover God. Take away that reaſon, and he would be incapable of underſtanding any thing; and, in this caſe, it would be juſt as conſiſtent to read even the book called the Bible, to a horſe as to a man. How then is it that thoſe people pretend to reject reaſon?

Almoſt the only parts in the book, called the Bible, that convey to us any idea of God, are ſome chapters in Job, and the 19th pſalm. I recollect no other. Thoſe parts are true *deiſtical* compoſitions; for they treat of the *Deity* through his works. They take the book of Creation as the word of God; they refer to no other book; and all the inferences they make are drawn from that volume.

I inſert, in this place, the 19th pſalm, as paraphraſed into Engliſh verſe, by Addiſon. I recollect not the proſe, and where I write this I have not the opportunity of ſeeing it.

The ſpacious firmament on high,
With all the blue etherial ſky,
And ſpangled heavens, a ſhining frame,
Their great original proclaim.
The unwearied ſun, from day to day,
Does his Creator's power diſplay,
And publiſhes to every land,
The work of an Almighty hand.
Soon as the evening ſhades prevail,
The moon takes up the wond'rous tale,
And nightly to the liſt'ning earth
Repeats the ſtory of her birth.
Whilſt all the ſtars that round her burn,
And all the planets in their turn,

Confirm the tidings as they roll,
And ſpread the truth from pole to pole.
What tho' in ſolemn ſilence, all
Move round this dark terreſtrial ball,
What tho' no real voice, nor ſound,
Amidſt their radiant orbs be found,
In reaſon's ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious voice;
For ever ſinging as they ſhine,
THE HAND THAT MADE US IS DIVINE.

What more does man want to know than that the hand, or power, that made theſe things is divine, is omnipotent. Let him believe this, with the force it is impoſſible to repel if he permits his reaſon to act, and his rule of moral life will follow of courſe.

The alluſions in Job have all of them the ſame tendency with this pſalm; that of deducing or proving a truth, that would be otherwiſe unknown, from truths already known.

I recollect not enough of the paſſages in Job to inſert them correctly: but there is one that occurs to me that is applicable to

the ſubject I am ſpeaking upon. "Canſt "thou by ſearching find out God; canſt "thou find out the Almighty to perfection."

I know not how the printers have pointed this paſſage, for I keep no Bible: but it contains two diſtinct queſtions that admits of diſtinct anſwers.

Firſt, Canſt thou by *ſearching* find out God? Yes. Becauſe, in the firſt place, I know I did not make myſelf, and yet I have exiſtence; and by *ſearching* into the nature of other things, I find that no other thing could make itſelf; and yet millions of other things exiſt; therefore it is, that I know, by poſitive concluſion reſulting from this ſearch, that there is a power ſuperior to all thoſe things, and that power is God.

Secondly, Canſt thou find out the Almighty to *perfection?* No. Not only becauſe the power and wiſdom he has manifeſted in the ſtructure of the creation that I behold, is to me incomprehenſible; but becauſe even this manifeſtation, great as it is, is probably but a ſmall diſplay of that immenſity

immenſity of power and wiſdom, by which millions of other worlds, to me inviſible by their diſtance, were created and continue to exiſt.

It is evident that both theſe queſtions were put to the reaſon of the perſon to whom they are ſuppoſed to have been addreſſed; and it is only by admitting the firſt queſtion to be anſwered affirmatively, that the ſecond could follow. It would have been unneceſſary, and even abſurd, to have put a ſecond queſtion more difficult than the firſt, if the firſt queſtion had been anſwered negatively. The two queſtions have different objects, the firſt refers to the exiſtence of God, the ſecond to his attributes. Reaſon can diſcover the one, but it falls infinitely ſhort in diſcovering the whole of the other.

I recollect not a ſingle paſſage in all the writings aſcribed to the men, called apoſtles, that convey any idea of what God is. Thoſe writings are chiefly controverſial; and the gloomineſs of the ſubject they dwell upon, that of a man dying in agony on a croſs, is better ſuited to the gloomy genius of a monk

in a cell, by whom it is not impoſſible they were written, than to any man breathing the open air of the creation. The only paſſage that occurs to me, that has any reference to the works of God, by which only his power and wiſdom can be known, is related to have been ſpoken by Jeſus Chriſt, as a remedy againſt diſtruſtful care. "Behold the lilies of the field, they toil not, neither do they ſpin." This, however, is far inferior to the alluſions in Job, and in the nineteenth pſalm; but it is ſimilar in idea, and the modeſty of the imagery is correſpondent to the modeſty of the man.

As to the chriſtian ſyſtem of faith, it appears to me as a ſpecies of atheiſm; a ſort of religious denial of God. It profeſſes to believe in a man rather than in God. It is a compound made up chiefly of maniſm with but little deiſm, and is as near to atheiſm as twilight is to darkneſs. It introduces between man and his Maker an opaque body which it calls a redeemer; as the moon introduces her opaque ſelf between the earth and the ſun, and it produces by this means a religious or an irreligious eclipſe of light.

It

It has put the whole orbit of reaſon into ſhade.

The effect of this obſcurity has been that of turning every thing upſide down, and repreſenting it in reverſe; and among the revolutions it has thus magically produced, it has made a revolution in Theology.

That which is now called natural philoſophy, embracing the whole circle of ſcience, of which aſtronomy occupies the chief place, is the ſtudy of the works of God and of the power and wiſdom of God in his works, and is the true theology.

As to the theology that is now ſtudied in its place, it is the ſtudy of human opinions and of human fancies *concerning* God. It is not the ſtudy of God himſelf in the works that he has made, but in the works or writings that man has made; and it is not among the leaſt of the miſchiefs that the chriſtian ſyſtem has done to the world, that it has abandoned the original and beautiful ſyſtem of theology, like a beautiful innocent to diſtreſs and reproach, to make room for the hag of ſuperſtition.

The book of Job, and the 19th pſalm, which even the church admits to be more ancient than the chronological order in which they ſtand in the book called the Bible, are theological orations conformable to the original ſyſtem of theology. The internal evidence of thoſe orations proves to a demonſtration, that the ſtudy and contemplation of the works of creation, and of the power and wiſdom of God revealed and manifeſted in thoſe works, made a great part of the religious devotion of the times in which they were written; and it was this devotional ſtudy and contemplation that led to the diſcovery of the principles upon which, what are now called Sciences, are eſtabliſhed; and it is to the diſcovery of theſe principles that almoſt all the Arts that contribute to the convenience of human life, owe their exiſtence. Every principal art has ſome ſcience for its parent, though the perſon who mechanically performs the work does not always, and but very ſeldom, perceive the connection.

It is a fraud of the chriſtian ſyſtem to call the ſciences *human inventions*; it is only the application

application of them that is human. Every ſcience has for its baſis a ſyſtem of principles as fixed and unalterable as thoſe by which the univerſe is regulated and governed. Man cannot make principles; he can only diſcover them:

For example. Every perſon who looks at an almanack ſees an account when an eclipſe will take place, and he ſees alſo that it never fails to take place according to the account there given. This ſhews that man is acquainted with the laws by which the heavenly bodies move. But it would be ſomething worſe than ignorance, were any church on earth to ſay, that thoſe laws are an human invention.

It would alſo be ignorance, or ſomething worſe, to ſay, that the ſcientific principles, by the aid of which man is enabled to calculate and fore-know when an eclipſe will take place, are an human invention. Man cannot invent any thing that is eternal and immutable; and the ſcientific principles he employs for this purpoſe, muſt, and are, of neceſſity, as eternal and immutable as the

laws

laws by which the heavenly bodies move, or they could not be uſed as they are, to aſcertain the time when, and the manner how, an eclipſe will take place.

The ſcientific principles that man employs to obtain the fore-knowledge of an eclipſe, or of any thing elſe relating to the motion of the heavenly bodies, are contained chiefly in that part of ſcience that is called trigonometry, or the properties of a triangle, which, when applied to the ſtudy of the heavenly bodies, is called aſtronomy; when applied to direct the courſe of a ſhip on the ocean, it is called navigation; when applied to the conſtruction of figures drawn by a rule and compaſs, it is called geometry; when applied to the conſtruction of plans of edifices, it is called architecture; when applied to the meaſurement of any portion of the ſurface of the earth, it is called land-ſurveying. In fine, it is the ſoul of ſcience. It is an eternal truth: it contains the *mathematical demonſtration* of which man ſpeaks, and the extent of its uſes are unknown.

It may be ſaid, that man can make or draw a triangle, and therefore a triangle is an human invention.

But the triangle, when drawn, is no other than the image of the principle: it is a delineation to the eye, and from thence to the mind, of a principle that would otherwiſe be imperceptible. The triangle does not make the principle, any more than a candle taken into a room that was dark, makes the chairs and tables that before were inviſible. All the properties of a triangle exiſt independently of the figure, and exiſted before any triangle was drawn or thought of by man. Man had no more to do in the formation of thoſe properties, or principles, than he had to do in making the laws by which the heavenly bodies move; and therefore the one muſt have the ſame divine origin as the other.

In the ſame manner as it may be ſaid, that man can make a triangle, ſo alſo may it be ſaid, he can make the mechanical inſtrument, called a lever. But the principle by which the lever acts, is a thing diſtinct from

from the inſtrument, and would exiſt if the inſtrument did not: it attaches itſelf to the inſtrument after it is made; the inſtrument therefore can act no otherwiſe than it does act; neither can all the effort of human invention make it act otherwiſe. That which, in all ſuch caſes, man calls the *effect*, is no other than the principle itſelf rendered perceptible to the ſenſes.

Since then man cannot make principles, from whence did he gain a knowledge of them, ſo as to be able to apply them, not only to things on earth, but to aſcertain the motion of bodies ſo immenſely diſtant from him as all the heavenly bodies are? From whence, I aſk, *could* he gain that knowledge, but from the ſtudy of the true theology?

It is the ſtructure of the univerſe that has taught this knowledge to man. That ſtructure is an ever exiſting exhibition of every principle upon which every part of mathematical ſcience is founded. The offspring of this ſcience is mechanics; for mechanics is no other than the principles of ſcience applied practically. The man who proportions

tions the ſeveral parts of a mill, uſes the ſame ſcientific principles, as if he had the power of conſtructing an univerſe: but as he cannot give to matter that inviſible agency, by which all the component parts of the immenſe machine of the univerſe have influence upon each other, and act in motional uniſon together without any apparent contact, and to which man has given the name of attraction, gravitation, and repulſion, he ſupplies the place of that agency by the humble imitation of teeth and cogs. All the parts of man's microcoſm muſt viſibly touch. But could he gain a knowledge of that agency, ſo as to be able to apply it in practice, we might then ſay, that another *canonical book* of the word of God had been diſcovered.

If man could alter the properties of the lever, ſo alſo could he alter the properties of the triangle: for a lever (taking that ſort of lever, which is called a ſteel-yard for the ſake of explanation) forms, when in motion, a triangle. The line it deſcends from, (one point of that line being in the fulcrum) the line it deſcends to, and the chord of the arc, which the end of the lever deſcribes

in

in the air, are the three ſides of a triangle. The other arm of the lever deſcribes alſo a triangle; and the correſponding ſides of thoſe two triangles, calculated ſcientifically or meaſured geometrically; and alſo the ſines, tangents, and ſecants generated from the angles, and geometrically meaſured, have the ſame proportions to each other, as the different weights have that will balance each other on the lever, leaving the weight of the lever out of the caſe.

It may alſo be ſaid that man can make a wheel and axis, that he can put wheels of different magnitudes together, and produce a mill. Still the caſe comes back to the ſame point, which is, that he did not make the principle that gives the wheels thoſe powers. That principle is as unalterable as in the former caſes, or rather it is the ſame principle under a different appearance to the eye.

The power that two wheels, of different magnitudes, have upon each other, is in the ſame proportion as if the ſemi-diameter of the two wheels were joined together and made

made into that kind of lever I have deſcribed, ſuſpended at the part where the ſemi-diameters join; for the two wheels, ſcientifically conſidered, are no other than the two circles generated by the motion of the compound lever.

It is from the ſtudy of the true theology that all our knowledge of ſcience is derived, and it is from that knowledge that all the arts have originated.

The Almighty lecturer, by diſplaying the principles of ſcience in the ſtructure of the univerſe, has invited man to ſtudy and to imitation. It is as if he had ſaid to the inhabitants of this globe that we call ours, "I have made an earth for man to dwell "upon, and I have rendered the ſtarry hea-"vens viſible, to teach him ſcience and the "arts. He can now provide for his own "comfort, AND LEARN FROM MY MUNIFI-"CENCE TO ALL, TO BE KIND TO EACH "OTHER."

Of what uſe is it, unleſs it be to teach man ſomething, that his eye is endowed with the

the power of beholding, to an incomprehenſible diſtance, an immenſity of worlds revolving in the ocean of ſpace? Or of what uſe is it that this immenſity of worlds is viſible to man? What has man to do with the Pleiades, with Orion, with Sirius, with the ſtar he calls the north ſtar, with the moving orbs he has named Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury, if no uſes are to follow from their being viſible? A leſs power of viſion would have been ſufficient for man, if the immenſity he now poſſeſſes were given only to waſte itſelf, as it were, on an immenſe deſert of ſpace glittering with ſhows.

It is only by contemplating what he calls the ſtarry heavens, as the book and ſchool of ſcience, that he diſcovers any uſe in their being viſible to him, or any advantage reſulting from his immenſity of viſion. But when he contemplates the ſubject in this light, he ſees an additional motive for ſaying that *nothing was made in vain*; for in vain would be this power of viſion if it taught man nothing.

As

As the chriſtian ſyſtem of faith has made a revolution in theology, ſo alſo has it made a revolution in the ſtate of learning. That which is now called learning was not learning originally. Learning does not conſiſt, as the ſchools now make it conſiſt, in the knowledge of languages, but in the knowledge of things to which language gives names.

The Greeks were a learned people; but learning with them, did not conſiſt in ſpeaking Greek, any more than in a Roman's ſpeaking Latin, or a Frenchman's ſpeaking French, or an Engliſhman's ſpeaking Engliſh. From what we know of the Greeks, it does not appear that they knew or ſtudied any language but their own; and this was one cauſe of their becoming ſo learned; it afforded them more time to apply themſelves to better ſtudies. The ſchools of the Greeks were ſchools of ſcience and philoſophy, and not of languages: and it is in the knowledge of the things that ſcience and philoſophy teach, that learning conſiſts.

Almoſt all the ſcientific learning that now exiſts, came to us from the Greeks, or the people who ſpoke the Greek language. It therefore became neceſſary to the people of other nations, who ſpoke a different language, that ſome among them ſhould learn the Greek language, in order that the learning the Greeks had, might be made known in thoſe nations, by tranſlating the Greek books of ſcience and philoſophy into the mother tongue of each nation.

The ſtudy therefore of the Greek language, (and in the ſame manner for the Latin) was no other than the drudgery buſineſs of a linguiſt; and the language thus obtained, was no other than the means, or as it were, the tools, employed to obtain the learning the Greeks had. It made no part of the learning itſelf; and was ſo diſtinct from it, as to make it exceeding probable, that the perſons who had ſtudied Greek ſufficiently to tranſlate thoſe works, ſuch, for inſtance, as Euclid's Elements, did not underſtand any of the learning the works contained.

As

As there is now nothing new to be learned from the dead languages, all the uſeful books being already tranſlated, the languages are become uſeleſs, and the time expended in teaching and in learning them is waſted. So far as the ſtudy of languages may contribute to the progreſs and communication of knowledge (for it has nothing to do with the *creation* of knowledge) it is only in the living languages that new knowledge is to be found: and certain it is, that, in general, a youth will learn more of a living language in one year, than of a dead language in ſeven; and it is but ſeldem that the teacher knows much of it himſelf. The difficulty of learning the dead languages does not ariſe from any ſuperior abſtruſeneſs in the languages themſelves, but in their *being dead*, and the pronunciation entirely loſt. It would be the ſame thing with any other language when it becomes dead. The beſt Greek linguiſt, that now exiſts, does not underſtand Greek ſo well as a Grecian plowman did, or a Grecian milkmaid; and the ſame for the Latin, compared with a plowman or a milkmaid of the Romans; and with reſpect to pronunciation, and idiom,

not ſo well as the cows that ſhe milked. It would therefore be advantageous to the ſtate of learning, to aboliſh the ſtudy of the dead languages, and to make learning conſiſt, as it originally did, in ſcientific knowledge.

The apology that is ſometimes made for continuing to teach the dead languages is, that they are taught at a time when a child is not capable of exerting any other mental faculty than that of memory. But this is altogether erroneous. The human mind has a natural diſpoſition to ſcientific knowledge, and to the things connected with it. The firſt and favourite amuſement of a child, even before it begins to play, is that of imitating the works of man. It builds houſes with cards or ſticks; it navigates the little ocean of a bowl of water with a paper boat; or dams the ſtream of a gutter, and contrives ſomething which it calls a mill; and it intereſts itſelf in the fate of its works with a care that reſembles affection. It afterwards goes to ſchool, where its genius is killed by the barren ſtudy of a dead language, and the philoſopher is loſt in the linguiſt.

But

But the apology that is now made for continuing to teach the dead languages, could not be the cauſe at firſt of cutting down learning to the narrow and humble ſphere of linguiſtry; the cauſe, therefore, muſt be ſought for elſewhere. In all reſearches of this kind, the beſt evidence that can be produced, is the internal evidence the thing carries with itſelf, and the evidence of circumſtances that unites with it, both of which, in this caſe, are not difficult to be diſcovered.

Putting then aſide, as matter of diſtinct conſideration, the outrage offered to the moral juſtice of God, by ſuppoſing him to make the innocent ſuffer for the guilty, and alſo the looſe morality and low contrivance of ſuppoſing him to change himſelf into the ſhape of a man, in order to make an excuſe to himſelf for not executing his ſuppoſed ſentence upon Adam; putting, I ſay, thoſe things aſide, as matter of diſtinct conſideration, it is certain, that what is called the chriſtian ſyſtem of faith, including in it the whimſical account of the creation; the ſtrange ſtory of Eve, the ſnake, and the ap-

ple; the amphibious idea of a man-god; the corporeal idea of the death of a god; the mythological idea of a family of gods; and the chriſtian ſyſtem of arithmetic, that three are one, and one is three, are all irreconcileable, not only to the divine gift of reaſon that God has given to man, but to the knowledge that man gains of the power and wiſdom of God, by the aid of the ſciences, and by ſtudying the ſtructure of the univerſe that God has made.

The ſetters up, therefore, and the advocates of the chriſtian ſyſtem of faith, could not but foreſee that the continually progreſſive knowledge that man would gain by the aid of ſcience, of the power and wiſdom of God, manifeſted in the ſtructure of the univerſe, and in all the works of creation, would militate againſt, and call into queſtion, the truth of their ſyſtem of faith; and therefore it became neceſſary to their purpoſe to cut learning down to a ſize leſs dangerous to their project, and this they effected by reſtricting the idea of learning to the dead ſtudy of dead languages.

They

They not only rejected the ſtudy of ſcience out of the chriſtian ſchools, but they perſecuted it; and it is only within about the laſt two centuries that the ſtudy has been revived. So late as 1610 Galileo, a Florentine, diſcovered and introduced the uſe of teleſcopes, and by applying them to obſerve the motions and appearances of the heavenly bodies, afforded additional means for aſcertaining the true ſtructure of the univerſe. Inſtead of being eſteemed for theſe diſcoveries, he was ſentenced to renounce them, or the opinions reſulting from them, as a damnable hereſy. And prior to that time Vigilius was condemned to be burned for aſſerting the antipodes, or in other words, that the earth was a globe, and habitable in every part where there was land; yet the truth of this is now too well known even to be told.

If the belief of errors not morally bad did no miſchief, it would make no part of the moral duty of man to oppoſe and remove them. There was no moral ill in believing the earth was flat like a trencher, any more than there was moral virtue in believing it was round like a globe; neither was there

any moral ill in believing that the Creator made no other world than this, any more than there was moral virtue in believing that he made millions, and that the infinity of ſpace is filled with worlds. But when a ſyſtem of religion is made to grow out of a ſuppoſed ſyſtem of creation that is not true, and to unite itſelf therewith in a manner almoſt inſeparable therefrom, the caſe aſſumes an entirely different ground. It is then that errors, not morally bad, become fraught with the ſame miſchiefs as if they were. It is then that the truth, though otherwiſe indifferent itſelf, becomes an eſſential, by becoming the criterion, that either confirms by correſponding evidence, or denies by contradictory evidence, the reality of the religion itſelf. In this view of the caſe it is the moral duty of man to obtain every poſſible evidence, that the ſtructure of the heathens, or any other part of creation affords, with reſpect to ſyſtems of religion. But this, the ſupporters or partizans of the chriſtian ſyſtem, as if dreading the reſult, inceſſantly oppoſed, and not only rejected the ſciences, but perſecuted the profeſſors. Had Newton or Deſcartes lived three or four

four hundred years ago, and purſued their ſtudies as they did, it is moſt probable they would not have lived to finiſh them; and had Franklin drawn lightning from the clouds at the ſame time, it would have been at the hazard of expiring for it in flames.

Latter times have laid all the blame upon the Goths and Vandals, but, however unwilling the partizans of the Chriſtian ſyſtem may be to believe or to acknowledge it, it is nevertheleſs true, that the age of ignorance commenced with the Chriſtian ſyſtem. There was more knowledge in the world before that period than for many centuries afterwards; and as to religious knowledge, the Chriſtian ſyſtem, as already ſaid, was only another ſpecies of mythology; and the mythology to which it ſucceeded, was a corruption of an ancient ſyſtem of theiſm.*

It

* It is impoſſible for us now to know at what time the heathen mythology began; but it is certain, from the internal evidence that it carries, that it did not begin in the ſame ſtate or condition in which it ended. All the gods of that mythology, except Saturn, were of modern invention. The ſuppoſed reign of Saturn was prior to that which is called the heathen mythology, and was ſo

far

It is owing to this long interregnum of ſcience, *and to no other cauſe*, that we have now to look back through a vaſt chaſm of

far a ſpecies of theiſm that it admitted the belief of only one God. Saturn is ſuppoſed to have abdicated the government in favour of his three ſons and one daughter, Jupiter, Pluto, Neptune and Juno: after this, thouſands of other gods and demi-gods were imaginarily created, and the calendar of gods increaſed as faſt as the calendar of ſaints, and the calendar of courts have increaſed ſince.

All the corruptions that have taken place in theology, and in religion, have been produced by admitting of what man calls *revealed religion*. The mythologiſts pretended to more revealed religion than the chriſtians do. They had their oracles and their prieſts, who were ſuppoſed to receive and deliver the word of God verbally on almoſt all occaſions.

Since then all corruptions, down from Moloch to modern predeſtinarianiſm, and the human ſacrifices of the heathens to the chriſtian ſacrifice of the Creator, have been produced by admitting what is called *revealed religion*, the moſt effectual means to prevent all ſuch evils and impoſitions, and is not to admit of any other revelation than that which is manifeſted in the book of Creation; and to contemplate the Creation, as the only true and real word of God that ever did or ever will exiſt, and that every thing elſe, called the word of God is fable and impoſition.

many hundred years to the reſpectable characters we call the ancients. Had the progreſſion of knowledge gone on proportionably with the ſtock that before exiſted, that chaſm would have been filled up with characters riſing ſuperior in knowledge to each other; and thoſe ancients, we now ſo much admire, would have appeared reſpectably in the back ground of the ſcene. But the chriſtian ſyſtem laid all waſte; and if we take our ſtand about the beginning of the ſixteenth century, we look back through that long chaſm, to the times of the ancients, as over a vaſt ſandy deſart, in which not a ſhrub appears to intercept the viſion to the fertile hills beyond.

It is an inconſiſtency, ſcarcely poſſible to be credited, that any thing ſhould exiſt under the name of a *religion*, that held it to be *irreligious* to ſtudy and contemplate the ſtructure of the univerſe that God had made. But the fact is too well eſtabliſhed to be denied. The event that ſerved more than any other, to break the firſt link in this long chain of deſpotic ignorance, is that known by the name of the reformation by Luther.

From

From that time, though it does not appear to have made any part of the intention of Luther, or of thoſe who are called reformers, the Sciences began to revive, and Liberality, their natural aſſociate, began to appear. This was the only public good the reformation did; for with reſpect to religious good, it might as well not have taken place. The mythology ſtill continued the ſame; and a multiplicity of national popes grew out of the downfal of the Pope of Chriſtendom.

Having thus ſhewn, from the internal evidence of things, the cauſe that produced a change in the ſtate of learning, and the motive for ſubſtituting the ſtudy of the dead languages in the place of the Sciences, I proceed, in addition to the ſeveral obſervations already made in the former part of this work, to compare, or rather to confront, the evidence that the ſtructure of the univerſe affords, with the chriſtian ſyſtem of religion. But as I cannot begin this part better than by referring to the ideas that occurred to me at an early part of life, and which I doubt not have occurred in ſome degree to almoſt every other perſon at one time

time or other, I ſhall ſtate what thoſe ideas were, and add thereto ſuch other matter as ſhall ariſe out of the ſubject, giving to the whole, by way of preface, a ſhort introduction.

My father being of the quaker profeſſion, it was my good fortune to have an exceedingly good moral education, and a tolerable ſtock of uſeful learning. Though I went to the grammar ſchool,* I did not learn Latin, not only becauſe I had no inclination to learn languages, but becauſe of the objection the quakers have againſt the books in which the language is taught. But this did not prevent me from being acquainted with the ſubjects of all the Latin books uſed in the ſchool.

The natural bent of my mind was to ſcience. I had ſome turn, and I believe ſome talent for poetry; but this I rather repreſſed than encouraged, as leading too much into

* The ſame ſchool, Thetford in Norfolk, that the preſent counſellor Mingay went to, and under the ſame maſter.

the

the field of imagination. As ſoon as I was able I purchaſed a pair of globes, and attended the philoſophical lectures of Martin and Ferguſon, and became afterwards acquainted with Dr. Bevis, of the ſociety, called the Royal Society, then living in the Temple, and an excellent aſtronomer.

I had no diſpoſition for what was called politics. It preſented to my mind no other idea than is contained in the word Jockeyſhip. When, therefore, I turned my thoughts towards matters of government, I had to form a ſyſtem for myſelf, that accorded with the moral and philoſophic principles in which I had been educated. I ſaw, or at leaſt I thought I ſaw, a vaſt ſcene opening itſelf to the world in the affairs of America; and it appeared to me, that unleſs the Americans changed the plan they were then purſuing, with reſpect to the government of England, and declare themſelves independent, they would not only involve themſelves in a multiplicity of new difficulties, but ſhut out the proſpect that was then offering itſelf to mankind through their means. It was from theſe motives that I publiſhed the

the work known by the name of *Common Senſe*, which is the firſt work I ever did publiſh: and ſo far as I can judge of myſelf, I believe I never ſhould have been known in the world as an author on any ſubject whatever, had it not been for the affairs of America. I wrote *Common Senſe* the latter end of the year 1775, and publiſhed it the firſt of January 1776. Independence was declared the fourth of July following.

Any perſon who has made obſervations on the ſtate and progreſs of the human mind, by obſerving his own, cannot but have obſerved, that there are two diſtinct claſſes of what are called Thoughts: thoſe that we produce in ourſelves by reflection and the act of thinking, and thoſe that bolt into the mind of their own accord. I have always made it a rule to treat thoſe voluntary viſitors with civility, taking care to examine, as well as I was able, if they were worth entertaining; and it is from them I have acquired almoſt all the knowledge that I have. As to the learning that any perſon gains from ſchool education, it ſerves only, like a ſmall capital, to put him in the way of beginning

learning

learning for himſelf afterwards. Every perſon of learning is finally his own teacher; the reaſon of which is, that principles, being of a diſtinct quality to circumſtances, cannot be impreſſed upon the memory. Their place of mental reſidence is the underſtanding, and they are never ſo laſting as when they begin by conception. Thus much for the introductory part.

From the time I was capable of conceiving an idea, and acting upon it by reflection, I either doubted the truth of the chriſtian ſyſtem, or thought it to be a ſtrange affair; I ſcarcely new which it was: but I well remember, when about ſeven or eight years of age, hearing a ſermon read by a relation of mine, who was a great devotee of the church, upon the ſubject of what is called *Redemption by the death of the Son of God.* After the ſermon was ended I went into the garden, and as I was going down the garden ſteps (for I perfectly recollect the ſpot) I revolted at the recollection of what I had heard, and thought to myſelf that it was making God Almighty act like a paſſionate man that killed his ſon when he could not revenge

revenge himſelf any other way; and as I was ſure a man would be hanged that did ſuch a thing, I could not ſee for what purpoſe they preached ſuch ſermons. This was not one of thoſe kind of thoughts that had any thing in it of childiſh levity; it was to me a ſerious reflection ariſing from the idea I had, that God was too good to do ſuch an action, and alſo too almighty to be under any neceſſity of doing it. I believe in the ſame manner to this moment; and I moreover believe, that any ſyſtem of religion that has any thing in it that ſhocks the mind of a child, cannot be a true ſyſtem.

It ſeems as if parents of the chriſtian profeſſion were aſhamed to tell their children any thing about the principles of their religion. They ſometimes inſtruct them in morals, and talk to them of the goodneſs of what they call Providence; for the chriſtian mythology has five deities: there is God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghoſt, the God Providence, and the Goddeſs Nature. But the chriſtian ſtory of God the Father putting his ſon to death, or employing people to do it (for that is the plain lan-

guage of the ſtory) cannot be told by a parent to a child; and to tell him that it was done to make mankind happier and better is making the ſtory ſtill worſe, as if mankind could be improved by the example of murder; and to tell him that all this is a myſtery, is only making an excuſe for the incredibility of it.

How different is this to the pure and ſimple profeſſion of Deiſm! The true deiſt has but one Deity; and his religion conſiſts in contemplating the power, wiſdom, and benignity of the Deity in his works, and in endeavouring to imitate him in every thing moral, ſcientifical, and mechanical.

The religion that approaches the neareſt of all others to true deiſm, in the moral and benign part thereof, is that profeſſed by the quakers, but they have contracted themſelves too much by leaving the works of God out of their ſyſtem. Though I reverence their philanthropy, I cannot help ſmiling at the conceit, that if the taſte of a quaker could have been conſulted at the creation, what a ſilent and drab-coloured creation

tion it would have been! Not a flower would have bloſſomed its gaities, nor a bird been permitted to ſing.

Quitting theſe reflections, I proceed to other matters. After I had made myſelf maſter of the uſe of the globes and of the orrery,* and conceived an idea of the infinity of ſpace, and of the eternal diviſibility of matter, and obtained, at leaſt, a general knowledge of what is called natural philoſophy, I began to compare, or, as I have before ſaid, to confront, the internal evidence thoſe things afford with the chriſtian ſyſtem of faith.

* As this book may fall into the hands of perſons who do not know what an orrery is, it is for their information I add this note, as the name gives no idea of the uſes of the thing. The orrery has its name from the perſon who invented it. It is a machinery of clock-work repreſenting the univerſe in miniature: and in which the revolution of the earth round itſelf and round the ſun, the revolution of the moon round the earth, the revolution of the planets round the ſun, their relative diſtances from the ſun, as the center of the whole ſyſtem, their relative diſtances from each other, and their different magnitudes, are repreſented as they really exiſt in what we call the heavens.

Though it is not a direct article of the chriſtian ſyſtem that this world that we inhabit is the whole of the habitable creation, yet it is ſo worked up therewith, from what is called the Moſaic account of the creation, the ſtory of Eve and the apple, and the counterpart of that ſtory, the death of the Son of God, that to believe otherwiſe, that is, to believe that God created a plurality of worlds, at leaſt as numerous as what we call ſtars, renders the chriſtian ſyſtem of faith at once little and ridiculous; and ſcatters it in the mind like feathers in the air. The two beliefs cannot be held together in the ſame mind; and he who thinks that he believes both, has thought but little of either.

Though the belief of a plurality of worlds was familiar to the ancients, it is only within the laſt three centuries that the extent and dimenſions of this globe that we inhabit, have been aſcertained. Several veſſels, following the tract of the ocean, have ſailed entirely round the world, as a man may march in a circle, and come round by the contrary ſide of the circle to the ſpot he ſet out from. The circular dimenſions of our

world

world in the wideſt part, as a man would meaſure the wideſt round of an apple or a ball, is only twenty five thouſand and twenty Engliſh miles, reckoning ſixty nine miles and an half to an equatorial degree, and may be ſailed round in the ſpace of about three years.*

A world of this extent may, at firſt thought, appear to us to be great; but if we compare it with the immenſity of ſpace in which it is ſuſpended, like a bubble or a balloon in the air, it is infinitely leſs in proportion than the ſmalleſt grain of ſand is to the ſize of the world, or the fineſt particle of dew to the whole ocean; and is therefore but ſmall; and, as will be hereafter ſhewn, is only *one* of a ſyſtem of worlds, of which the univerſal creation is compoſed.

It is not difficult to gain ſome faint idea of the immenſity of ſpace in which this and all the other worlds are ſuſpended, if we follow a progreſſion of ideas. When we think of the ſize or dimenſions of a room,

* Allowing a ſhip to ſail, on an average, three miles in an hour, ſhe would ſail entirely round the world in leſs than one year, if ſhe could ſail in a direct circle; but ſhe is obliged to follow the courſe of the ocean.

our ideas limit themſelves to the walls, and there they ſtop. But when our eye, or our imagination, darts into ſpace, that is, when it looks upward into what we call the open air, we cannot conceive any walls or boundaries it can have; and if for the ſake of reſting our ideas, we ſuppoſe a boundary, the queſtion immediately renews itſelf, and aſks, what is beyond that boundary? and in the ſame manner, what is beyond the next boundary? and ſo on, till the fatigued imagination returns and ſays, *there is no end.* Certainly, then, the Creator was not pent for room when he made this world no larger than it is; and we have to ſeek the reaſon in ſomething elſe.

If we take a ſurvey of our own world, or rather of this, of which the Creator has given us the uſe, as our portion in the immenſe ſyſtem of creation, we find every part of it, the earth, the waters, and the air that ſurround it, filled, and, as it were, crouded with life, down from the largeſt animals that we know of, to the ſmalleſt inſects the naked eye can behold, and from thence to others ſtill ſmaller, and totally inviſible without

out the aſſiſtance of the microſcope. Every tree, every plant, every leaf, ſerves not only as an habitation, but as a world to ſome numerous race, till animal exiſtence becomes ſo exceedingly refined, that the effluvia of a blade of graſs would be food for thouſands.

Since then no part of our earth is left unoccupied, why is it to be ſuppoſed, that the immenſity of ſpace is a naked void, lying in eternal waſte. There is room for millions of worlds as large or larger than ours, and each of them millions of miles apart from each other.

Having now arrived at this point, if we carry our ideas only one thought further, we ſhall ſee, perhaps, the true reaſon, at leaſt a very good reaſon for our happineſs, why the Creator, inſtead of making one immenſe world, extending over an immenſe quantity of ſpace, has preferred dividing that quantity of matter into ſeveral diſtinct and ſeparate worlds, which we call planets, of which our earth is one. But before I explain my ideas upon this ſubject, it is neceſſary (not for the ſake of thoſe that already know,

but for thoſe who do not) to ſhew what the ſyſtem of the univerſe is.

That part of the univerſe, that is called the ſolar ſyſtem (meaning the ſyſtem of worlds to which our earth belongs, and of which Sol, or in Engliſh language the Sun, is the center) conſiſts, beſides the Sun, or ſix diſtinct orbs, or planets, or worlds, beſides the ſecondary bodies, called the ſatellites, or moons, of which our earth has one that attends her in her annual revolution round the ſun, in like manner as the other ſatellites, or moons, attend the planets, or worlds, to which they ſeverally belong, as may be ſeen by the aſſiſtance of the teleſcope.

The Sun is the center, round which thoſe ſix worlds, or planets, revolve at different diſtances therefrom, and in circles concentric to each other. Each world keeps conſtantly in nearly the ſame tract round the Sun, and continues, at the ſame time, turning round itſelf, in nearly an upright poſition, as a top turns round itſelf when it is ſpinning on the ground, and leans a little ſideways.

It is this leaning of the earth, ($23\frac{1}{2}$ degrees) that occaſions ſummer and winter, and the different length of days and nights. If the earth turned round itſelf in a poſition perpendicular to the plane or level of the circle it moves in round the Sun, as a top turns round when it ſtands erect on the ground, the days and nights would be always of the ſame length, twelve hours day, and twelve hours night, and the ſeaſon would be uniformly the ſame throughout the year.

Every time that a planet (our earth for example) turns round itſelf, it makes what we call day and night; and every time it goes entirely round the Sun, it makes what we call a year, conſequently our world turns three hundred and ſixty-five times round itſelf, in going once round the Sun.*

The names that the ancients gave to thoſe ſix worlds, and which are ſtill called by the

* Thoſe who ſuppoſed that the Sun went round the earth every twenty-four hours, made the ſame miſtake in idea, that a cook would do in fact, that ſhould make the fire go round the meat, inſtead of the meat turning round itſelf towards the fire.

ſame names, are Mercury, Venus, this world that we call ours, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. They appear larger to the eye than the ſtars, being many million miles nearer to our earth than any of the ſtars are. The planet Venus is that which is called the evening ſtar, and ſometimes the morning ſtar, as ſhe happens to ſet after, or riſe before the Sun, which, in either caſe, is never more than three hours.

The Sun, as before ſaid, being the center, the planet, or world, neareſt the Sun, is Mercury; his diſtance from the Sun is thirty-four million miles, and he moves round in a circle always at that diſtance from the Sun, as a top may be ſuppoſed to ſpin round in the tract in which a horſe goes in a mill. The ſecond world is Venus; ſhe is fifty-ſeven million miles diſtant from the Sun, and conſequently moves round in a circle much greater than that of Mercury. The third world is this that we inhabit, and which is eighty-eight million miles diſtant from the Sun, and conſequently moves round in a circle greater than that of Venus. The

fourth

fourth world is Mars; he is diſtant from the Sun one hundred and thirty-four million miles, and conſequently moves round in a circle greater than that of our earth. The fifth is Jupiter; he is diſtant from the Sun five hundred and fifty-ſeven million miles, and conſequently moves round in a circle greater than that of Mars. The ſixth world is Saturn; he is diſtant from the Sun ſeven hundred and ſixty-three million miles, and conſequently moves round in a circle that ſurrounds the circles or orbits of all the other worlds or planets.

The ſpace, therefore, in the air, or in the immenſity of ſpace, that our ſolar ſyſtem takes up for the ſeveral worlds to perform their revolutions in round the ſun, is of the extent in a ſtrait line of the whole diameter of the orbit or circle, in which Saturn moves round the Sun, which being double his diſtance from the Sun, is fifteen hundred and twenty-ſix million miles; and its circular extent is nearly five thouſand million, and its globical content is almoſt three thouſand

five

five hundred million times three thouſand five hundred million ſquare miles.*

But this, immenſe as it is, is only one ſyſtem of worlds. Beyond this, at a vaſt diſtance into ſpace, far beyond all power of calculation, are the ſtars called the fixed ſtars. They are called fixed, becauſe they have no

* If it ſhould be aſked, how can man know theſe things? I have one plain anſwer to give, which is, that man knows how to calculate an eclipſe, and alſo how to calculate, to a minute of time, when the planet Venus, in making her revolutions round the Sun, will come in a ſtrait line between our earth, and the Sun, and will appear to us about the ſize of a large pea paſſing acroſs the face of the Sun. This happens but twice in about an hundred years, at the diſtance of about eight years from each other, and has happened twice in our time, both of which were foreknown by calculation. It can alſo be known when they will happen again for a thouſand years to come, or to any other portion of time. As, therefore, man could not be able to do thoſe things if he did not underſtand the ſolar ſyſtem, and the manner in which the revolutions of the ſeveral planets or worlds are performed, the fact of calculating an eclipſe or a tranſit of Venus, is a proof in point that the knowledge exiſts; and as to a few thouſand, or even a few million miles more or leſs, it makes ſcarcely any ſenſible difference in ſuch immenſe diſtances.

revolutionary

revolutionary motion as the ſix worlds or planets have that I have been deſcribing. Thoſe fixed ſtars continue always at the ſame diſtance from each other, and always in the ſame place, as the Sun does in the center of our ſyſtem. The probability therefore is, that each of thoſe fixed ſtars is alſo a Sun, round which another ſyſtem of worlds or planets, though too remote for us to diſcover, performs its revolutions, as our ſyſtem of worlds does round our central Sun.

By this eaſy progreſſion of ideas, the immenſity of ſpace will appear to us to be filled with ſyſtems of worlds; and that no part of ſpace lies at waſte, any more than any part of our globe of earth and water is left unoccupied.

Having thus endeavoured to convey, in a familiar and eaſy manner, ſome idea of the ſtructure of the univerſe, I return to explain what I before alluded to, namely, the great benefits ariſing to man in conſequence of the Creator having made a *plurality* of worlds, ſuch as our ſyſtem is, conſiſting of a central ſun and ſix worlds, beſides ſatellites, in preference

ference to that of creating one world only of a vaſt extent.

It is an idea I have never loſt ſight of, that all our knowledge of ſcience is derived from the revolutions (exhibited to our eye, and from thence to our underſtanding) which thoſe ſeveral planets, or worlds, of which our ſyſtem is compoſed, make in their circuit round the Sun.

Had then the quantity of matter which theſe ſix worlds contain been blended into one ſolitary globe, the conſequence to us would have been, that either no revolutionary motion would have exiſted, or not a ſufficiency of it, to give us the ideas and the knowledge of ſcience we now have; and it is from the ſciences that all the mechanical arts that contribute ſo much to our earthly felicity and comfort are derived.

As therefore the Creator made nothing in vain, ſo alſo muſt it be believed that he organized the ſtructure of the univerſe in the moſt advantageous manner for the benefit of man; and as we ſee, and from experience feel, the

the benefits we derive from the ſtructure of the univerſe, formed as it is, which benefits we ſhould not have had the opportunity of enjoying, if the ſtructure, ſo far as relates to our ſyſtem, had been a ſolitary globe, we can diſcover, at leaſt, one reaſon why a *plurality* of worlds has been made, and that reaſon calls forth the devotional gratitude of man, as well as his admiration.

But it is not to us, the inhabitants of this globe, only, that the benefits ariſing from a plurality of worlds are limited. The inhabitants of each of the worlds, of which our ſyſtem is compoſed, enjoy the ſame opportunities of knowledge as we do. They behold the revolutionary motions of our earth, as we behold theirs. All the planets revolve in ſight of each other; and therefore the ſame univerſal ſchool of ſcience preſents itſelf to all.

Neither does the knowledge ſtop here. The ſyſtem of worlds, next to us, exhibits in its revolutions, the ſame principles and ſchool of ſcience, to the inhabitants of their ſyſtem,

ſyſtem, as our ſyſtem does to us, and in like manner throughout the immenſity of ſpace.

Our ideas, not only of the almightineſs of the Creator, but of his wiſdom and his beneficence, become enlarged in proportion as we contemplate the extent and the ſtructure of the univerſe. The ſolitary idea of a ſolitary world rolling, or at reſt, in the immenſe ocean of ſpace, gives place to the cheerful idea of a ſociety of worlds, ſo happily contrived, as to adminiſter, even by their motion, inſtruction to man. We ſee our own earth filled with abundance; but we forget to conſider how much of that abundance is owing to the ſcientific knowledge the vaſt machinery of the univerſe has unfolded.

But, in the midſt of thoſe reflections, what are we to think of the chriſtian ſyſtem of faith that forms itſelf upon the idea of only one world, and that of no greater extent, as is before ſhewn, than twenty five thouſand miles. An extent, which a man walking at the rate of three miles an hour, for twelve hours in the day, could he keep on in a circular direction, would walk entirely round

in

in leſs than two years. Alas! what is this to the mighty ocean of ſpace, and the almighty power of the Creator!

From whence then could ariſe the ſolitary and ſtrange conceit that the Almighty, who had millions of worlds equally dependent on his protection, ſhould quit the care of all the reſt, and come to die in our world, becauſe, they ſay, one man and one woman had eaten an apple. And, on the other hand, are we to ſuppoſe that every world, in the boundleſs creation, had an Eve, an apple, a ſerpent, and a redeemer. In this caſe, the perſon who is irreverently called the Son of God, and ſometimes God himſelf, would have nothing elſe to do than to travel from world to world, in an endleſs ſucceſſion of death, with ſcarcely a momentary interval of life.

It has been, by rejecting the evidence, that the word, or works of God in the creation, affords to our ſenſes, and the action of our reaſon upon that evidence, that ſo many wild and whimſical ſyſtems of faith, and of religion, have been fabricated and ſet up.

There may be many ſyſtems of religion, that ſo far from being morally bad, are in many reſpects morally good: but there can be but ONE that is true; and that one, neceſſarily muſt, as it ever will, be in all things conſiſtent with the ever exiſting word of God that we behold in his works. But ſuch is, the ſtrange conſtruction of the Chriſtian ſyſtem of faith, that every evidence the heavens affords to man, either directly contradicts it, or renders it abſurd.

It is poſſible to believe, and I always feel pleaſure in encouraging myſelf to believe it, that there have been men in the world who perſuaded themſelves that, what is called *a pious fraud*, might, at leaſt under particular circumſtances, be productive of ſome good. But the fraud being once eſtabliſhed, could not afterwards be explained; for it is with a pious fraud, as with a bad action, it begets a calamitous neceſſity of going on.

The perſons who firſt preached the chriſtian ſyſtem of faith, and in ſome meaſure combined with it the morality preached by Jeſus Chriſt, might perſuade themſelves that it

it was better than the heathen mythology that then prevailed. From the firſt preachers, the fraud went on to the ſecond, and to the third, till the idea of its being a pious fraud became loſt in the belief of its being true; and that belief came again encouraged by the intereſt of thoſe who made a livelihood by preaching it.

But though ſuch a belief might, by ſuch means, be rendered almoſt general among the laity, it is next to impoſſible to account for the continual perſecution carried on by the church, for ſeveral hundred years, againſt the ſciences and againſt the profeſſors of ſcience, if the church had not ſome record or ſome tradition, that it was originally no other than a pious fraud, or did not foreſee, that it could not be maintained againſt the evidence that the ſtructure of the univerſe afforded.

Having thus ſhewn the irreconcileable inconſiſtencies between the real word of God exiſting in the univerſe, and that which is called, *the word of God*, as ſhewn to us in a printed book, that any man might make, I

proceed to ſpeak of the three principal means that have been employed in all ages, and perhaps in all countries, to impoſe upon mankind.

Thoſe three means are, Myſtery, Miracle, and Prophecy. The two firſt are incompatible with true religion, and the third ought always to be ſuſpected.

With reſpect to myſtery, every thing we behold is, in one ſenſe a myſtery, to us. Our own exiſtence is a myſtery: the whole vegetable world is a myſtery. We cannot account how it is that an acorn, when put into the ground, is made to develop itſelf, and become an oak. We know not how it is that the ſeed we ſow unfolds and multiplies itſelf, and returns to us ſuch an abundant intereſt for ſo ſmall a capital.

The fact, however, as diſtinct from the operating cauſe, is not a myſtery becauſe we ſee it; and we know alſo the means we are to uſe, which is no other than putting the ſeed in the ground. We know therefore as much as is neceſſary for us to know; and that

that part of the operation that we do not know, and which if we did, we could not perform, the Creator takes upon himſelf and performs it for us. We are therefore better off than if we had been let into the ſecret, and left to do it for ourſelves.

But though every created thing is in this ſenſe a myſtery, the word myſtery cannot be applied to *moral truth*, any more than obſcurity can be applied to light. The God in whom we believe is a God of moral truth, and not a God of myſtery or obſcurity. Myſtery is the antagoniſt of truth. It is a fog of human invention, that obſcures truth and repreſents it in diſtortion. Truth never invelops *itſelf* in myſtery; and the myſtery in which it is at any time enveloped, is the work of its antagoniſt, and never of itſelf.

Religion, therefore, being the belief of a God, and the practice of moral truth, cannot have connection with myſtery. The belief of a God, ſo far from having any thing of myſtery in it, is of all beliefs the moſt eaſy, becauſe it ariſes to us, as is before ob-

ſerved, out of neceſſity. And the practice of moral truth, or in other words, a practical imitation of the moral goodneſs of God, is no other than our acting towards each other, as he acts benignly towards all. We cannot *ſerve* God in the manner we ſerve thoſe who cannot do without ſuch ſervice; and, therefore, the only idea we can have of ſerving God, is that of contributing to the happineſs of the living creation that God has made. This cannot be done by retiring ourſelves from the ſociety of the world, and ſpending a recluſe life in ſelfiſh devotion.

The very nature and deſign of religion, if I may ſo expreſs it, prove even to demonſtration, that it muſt be free from every thing of myſtery, and unincumbered with every thing that is myſterious. Religion, conſidered as a duty, is incumbent upon every living ſoul alike, and therefore muſt be on a level to the underſtanding and comprehenſion of all. Man does not learn religion as he learns the ſecrets and myſteries of a trade. He learns the theory of religion by reflection. It ariſes out of the action of his own mind upon the things which he ſees,

ſees, or upon what he may happen to hear or to read, and the practice joins itſelf thereto.

When men, whether from policy or pious fraud, ſet up ſyſtems of religion incompatible with the word or works of God in the creation, and not only above but repugnant to human comprehenſion, they were under the neceſſity of inventing, or adopting, a word that ſhould ſerve as a bar to all queſtions, inquiries, and ſpeculations. The word *myſtery* anſwered this purpoſe; and thus it has happened, that religion, which, in itſelf, is without myſtery, has been corrupted into a fog of myſteries.

As *myſtery* anſwered all general purpoſes, *miracle* followed as an occaſional auxiliary. The former ſerved to bewilder the mind, the latter to puzzle the ſenſes. The one was the lingo; the other the legerdemain.

But before going further into this ſubject, it will be proper to inquire what is to be underſtood by a miracle.

In the ſame ſenſe that every thing may be ſaid to be a myſtery, ſo alſo may it be ſaid, that every thing is a miracle, and that no one thing is a greater miracle than another. The elephant, though larger, is not a greater miracle than a mite; nor a mountain a greater miracle than an atom. To an almighty power, it is no more difficult to make the one than the other, and no more difficult to make a million of worlds, than to make one. Every thing therefore is a miracle in one ſenſe; whilſt, in the other ſenſe, there is no ſuch thing as a miracle. It is a miracle when compared to our power, and to our comprehenſion. It is not a miracle compared to the power that performs it. But as nothing in this deſcription conveys the idea that is affixed to the word miracle, it is neceſſary to carry the inquiry further.

Mankind have conceived to themſelves certain laws by which, what they call, nature, is ſuppoſed to act; and that a miracle is ſomething contrary to the operation and effect of thoſe laws. But unleſs we know the whole extent of thoſe laws, and of what are commonly called, the powers of nature,

we

we are not able to judge whether any thing that may appear to us wonderful, or miraculous, be within, or be beyond, or be contrary to, her natural power of acting.

The aſcenſion of a man ſeveral miles high into the air, would have every thing in it that conſtitutes the idea of a miracle, if it were not known that a ſpecies of air can be generated ſeveral times lighter than the common atmoſpheric air, and yet poſſeſs elaſticity enough to prevent the balloon, in which that light air is incloſed, from being compreſſed into as many times leſs bulk, by the common air that ſurrounds it. In like manner, extracting flaſhes or ſparks of fire from the human body as viſibly as from a ſteel ſtruck with a flint, and cauſing iron or ſteel to move without any viſible agent, would alſo give the idea of a miracle, if we were not acquainted with electricity and magnetiſm: ſo alſo would many other experiments in natural philoſophy, to thoſe who are not acquainted with the ſubject. The reſtoring perſons to life, who are to appearance dead, as is practiſed upon drowned perſons, would alſo be a miracle, if it were not known that animation

animation is capable of being ſuſpended without being extinct.

Beſides theſe, there are performances by ſlight of hand, and by perſons acting in concert, that have a miraculous appearance, which, when known, are thought nothing of. And beſides theſe, there are mechanical and optical deceptions. There is now an exhibition in Paris of ghoſts or ſpectres, which, though it is not impoſed upon the ſpectators as a fact, has an aſtoniſhing appearance. As therefore we know not the extent to which either nature or art can go, there is no poſitive criterion to determine what a miracle is; and mankind, in giving credit to appearances, under the idea of their being miracles, are ſubject to be continually impoſed upon.

Since then appearances are ſo capable of deceiving, and things not real have a ſtrong reſemblance to things that are, nothing can be more inconſiſtent, than to ſuppoſe, that the Almighty would make uſe of means, ſuch as are called miracles, that would ſubject the perſon who performed them to the ſuſpicion of being an impoſtor, and the perſon

ſon who related them to be ſuſpected of lying, and the doctrine intended to be ſupported thereby, to be ſuſpected as a fabulous invention.

Of all the modes of evidence that ever were invented to obtain belief to any ſyſtem or opinion, to which the name of religion has been given, that of *miracle*, however ſucceſsful the impoſition may have been, is the moſt inconſiſtent. For, in the firſt place, whenever recourſe is had to ſhow, for the purpoſe of procuring that belief (for a miracle, under any idea of the word, is a ſhow) it implies a lameneſs or weakneſs in the doctrine that is preached. And, in the ſecond place, it is degrading the Almighty into the character of a ſhow-man, playing tricks to amuſe and make the people ſtare and wonder. It is alſo the moſt equivocal ſort of evidence that can be ſet up; for the belief is not to depend upon the thing called a miracle, but upon the credit of the reporter, who ſays that he ſaw it; and therefore the thing, were it true, would have no better chance of being believed than if it were a lie.

Suppoſe

Suppoſe, I were to ſay, that when I ſat down to write this book, a hand preſented itſelf in the air, took up the pen, and wrote every word that is herein written; would any body believe me? certainly they would not. Would they believe me a whit the more if the thing had been a fact? certainly they would not. Since then, a real miracle, were it to happen, would be ſubject to the ſame fate as the falſhood, the inconſiſtency becomes the greater, of ſuppoſing the Almighty would make uſe of means that would not anſwer the purpoſe for which they were intended, even if they were real.

If we are to ſuppoſe a miracle to be ſomething ſo entirely out of the courſe of what is called nature, that ſhe muſt go out of that courſe to accompliſh it; and we ſee an account given of ſuch miracle by the perſon who ſaid he ſaw it, it raiſes a queſtion in the mind very eaſily decided, which is, Is it more probable that nature ſhould go out of her courſe, or that a man ſhould tell a lie? We have never ſeen, in our time, nature go out of her courſe, but we have good reaſon to believe that millions of lies have been told

in

in the ſame time; it is therefore at leaſt millions to one, that the reporter of a miracle tells a lie.

The ſtory of the whale ſwallowing Jonah, though a whale is large enough to do it, borders greatly on the marvellous; but it would have approached nearer to the idea of a miracle, if Jonah had ſwallowed the whale. In this, which may ſerve for all caſes of miracles, the matter would decide itſelf as before ſtated, namely, Is it more probable that a man ſhould have ſwallowed a whale, or told a lie?

But ſuppoſing that Jonah had really ſwallowed the whale, and gone with it in his belly to Nineveh, and to convince the people that it was true, have caſt it up in their ſight of the full length and ſize of a whale, would they not have believed him to have been the devil inſtead of a prophet? or, if the whale had carried Jonah to Nineveh, and caſt him up in the ſame public manner, would they not have believed the whale to have been the devil, and Jonah one of his imps?

The moſt extraordinary of all the things called miracles, related in the New Teſtament, is that of the devil flying away with Jeſus Chriſt, and carrying him to the top of a high mountain; and to the top of the higheſt pinnacle of the temple, and ſhowing him, and promiſing to him *all the kingdoms of the world.* How happened it that he did not diſcover America? or is it only with *kingdoms* that his ſooty highneſs has any intereſt?

I have too much reſpect for the moral character of Chriſt, to believe that he told this whale of a miracle himſelf; neither is it eaſy to account for what purpoſe it could have been fabricated, unleſs it were to impoſe upon the connoiſſeurs of miracles, as is ſometimes practiſed upon the connoiſſeurs of Queen Anne's farthings, and collectors of relics and antiquities; or to render the belief of miracles ridiculous, by outdoing miracle, as Don Quixote outdid chivalry; or to embarraſs the belief of miracles by making it doubtful by what power, whether of God, or of the devil, any thing called a miracle was performed. It requires, however, a great deal

deal of faith in the devil to believe this miracle.

In every point of view, in which thoſe things called miracles can be placed and conſidered, the reality of them is improbable, and their exiſtence unneceſſary. They would not, as before obſerved, anſwer any uſeful purpoſe, even if they were true; for it is more difficult to obtain belief to a miracle, than to a principle evidently moral, without any miracle. Moral principle ſpeaks univerſally for itſelf. Miracle could be but a thing of the moment, and ſeen but by a few; after this, it requires a transfer of faith, from God to man, to believe a miracle upon man's report. Inſtead therefore of admitting the recitals of miracles, as evidence of any ſyſtem of religion being true, they ought to be conſidered as ſymptoms of its being fabulous. It is neceſſary to the full and upright character of truth, that it rejects the crutch; and it is conſiſtent with the character of fable, to ſeek the aid that truth rejects. Thus much for myſtery and miracle.

As

As myſtery and miracle took charge of the paſt and the preſent, prophecy took charge of the future, and rounded the tenſes of faith. It was not ſufficient to know what had been done, but what would be done. The ſuppoſed prophet was the ſuppoſed hiſtorian of times to come; and if he happened, in ſhooting with a long bow of a thouſand years, to ſtrike within a thouſand miles of a mark, the ingenuity of poſterity could make it point-blank; and if he happened to be directly wrong, it was only to ſuppoſe, as in the caſe of Jonah and Nineveh, that God had repented himſelf, and changed his mind. What a fool do fabulous ſyſtems make of man!

It has been ſhewn in a former part of this work, that the original meaning of the words *prophet* and *propheſying* has been changed, and that a prophet, in the ſenſe the word is now uſed, is a creature of modern invention; and it is owing to this change in the meaning of the words, that the flights and metaphors of the Jewiſh poets, and phraſes and expreſſions now rendered obſcure by our not being acquainted with the local circumſtances

ſtances to which they applied at the time they were uſed, have been erected into prophecies, and made to bend to explanations at the will and whimſical conceits of ſectaries, expounders, and commentators. Every thing unintelligible was prophetical, and every thing inſignificant was typical. A blunder would have ſerved for a prophecy; and a diſh-clout for a type.

If by a prophet we are to ſuppoſe a man, to whom the Almighty communicated ſome event that would take place in future, either there were ſuch men, or there were not. If there were, it is conſiſtent to believe that the event, ſo communicated, would be told in terms that could be underſtood; and not related in ſuch a looſe and obſcure manner as to be out of the comprehenſion of thoſe that heard it, and ſo equivocal as to fit almoſt any circumſtance that might happen afterwards. It is conceiving very irreverently of the Almighty to ſuppoſe he would deal in this jeſting manner with mankind: yet all the things called prophecies, in the book called the Bible, come under this deſcription.

But it is with prophecy, as it is with miracle. It could not anſwer the purpoſe even if it were real. Thoſe to whom a prophecy ſhould be told, could not tell whether the man propheſied or lied, or whether it had been revealed to him, or whether he conceited it: and if the thing that he propheſied, or pretended to propheſy, ſhould happen, or ſomething like it among the multitude of things that are daily happening, nobody could again know whether he foreknew it, or gueſſed at it, or whether it was accidental. A prophet, therefore, is a character uſeleſs and unneceſſary; and the ſafe ſide of the caſe is, to guard againſt being impoſed upon by not giving credit to ſuch relations.

Upon the whole, myſtery, miracle, and prophecy, are appendages that belong to fabulous and not to true religion. They are the means by which ſo many *Lo heres!* and *Lo theres!* have been ſpread about the world, and religion been made into a trade. The ſucceſs of one impoſtor gave encouragement to another, and the quieting ſalvo of

of doing *ſome good* by keeping up a *pious fraud*, protected them from remorſe.

Having now extended the ſubject to a greater length than I firſt intended, I ſhall bring it to a cloſe by abſtracting a ſummary from the whole.

Firſt, That the idea or belief of a word of God exiſting in print, or in writing, or in ſpeech, is inconſiſtent in itſelf for the reaſons already aſſigned. Theſe reaſons, among many others, are the want of an univerſal language; the mutability of language; the errors to which tranſlations are ſubject; the poſſibility of totally ſuppreſſing ſuch a word; the probability of altering it, or of fabricating the whole, and impoſing it upon the world.

Secondly, That the creation we behold is the real and ever exiſting word of God, in which we cannot be deceived. It proclaimeth his power, it demonſtrates his wiſdom, it manifeſts his goodneſs and beneficence.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, That the moral duty of man conſiſts in imitating the moral goodneſs and beneficence of God manifeſted in the creation towards all his creatures. That ſeeing, as we daily do, the goodneſs of God to all men, it is an example calling upon all men to practiſe the ſame towards each other; and conſequently that every thing of perſecution and revenge between man and man, and every thing of cruelty to animals is a violation of moral duty.

I trouble not myſelf about the manner of future exiſtence. I content myſelf with believing, even to poſitive conviction, that the power that gave me exiſtence is able to continue it, in any form and manner he pleaſes, either with or without this body; and it appears more probable to me that I ſhall continue to exiſt hereafter, than that I ſhould have had exiſtence, as I now have, before that exiſtence began.

It is certain that, in one point, all nations of the earth, and all religions agree. All believe in a God. The things in which they diſagree, are the redundancies annexed

to

to that belief; and therefore, if ever an univerſal religion ſhould prevail, it will not be believing any thing new, but in getting rid of redundancies, and believing as man believed at firſt. Adam, if ever there was ſuch a man, was created a Deiſt; but in the mean time let every man follow, as he has a right to do, the religion and the worſhip he prefers.

THE END.

PAZAKERLEY. SINDH